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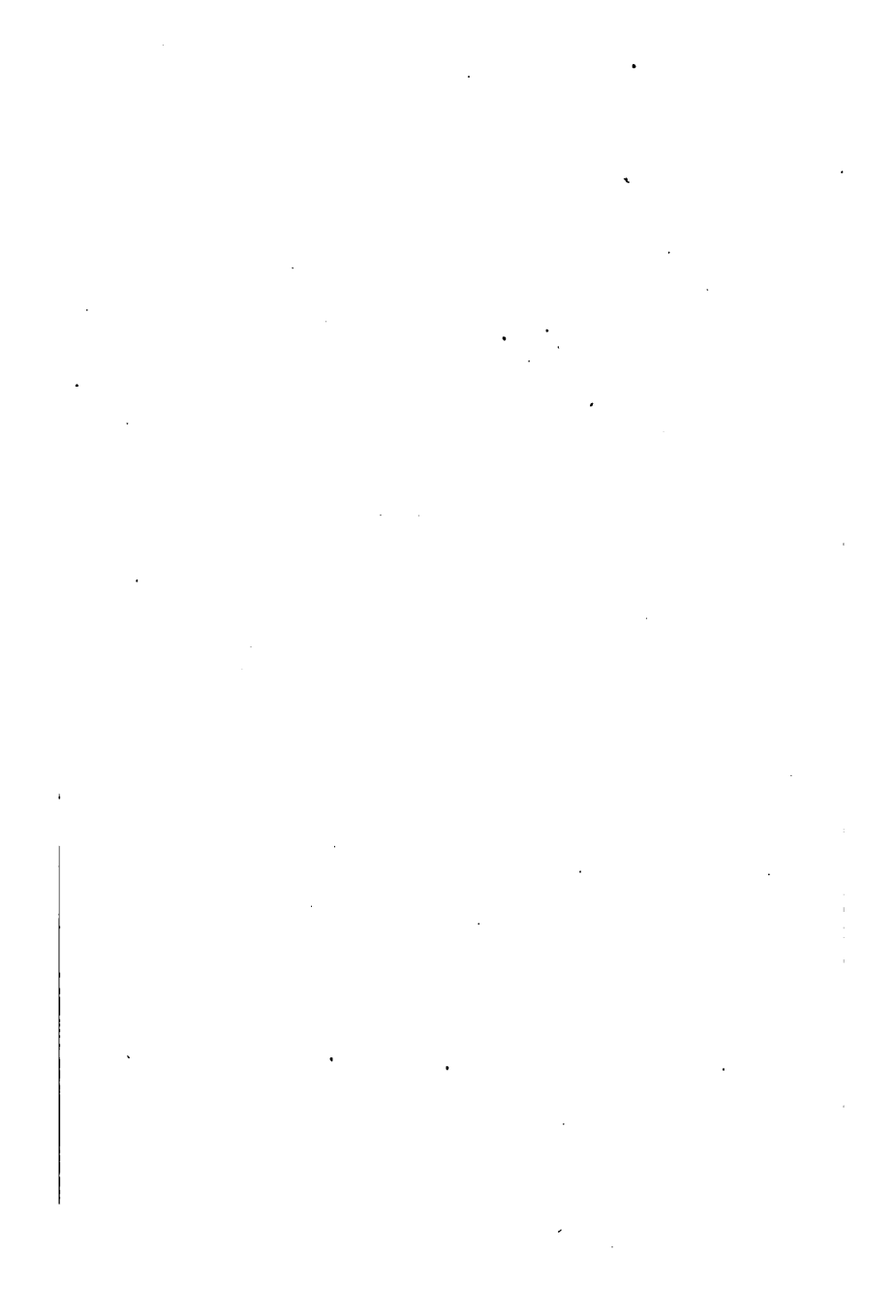
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*A FRENCH COUNTRY
FAMILY*



*A FRENCH COUNTRY
FAMILY*



Frontispiece.



"MAMMA, MAY I KEEP MY CAT?"

A FRENCH COUNTRY FAMILY

BY MADAME DE WITT, NÉE GUIZOT

TRANSLATED BY THE AUTHOR OF 'JOHN HALIFAX, GENTLEMAN'



ALEXANDER STRAHAN, PUBLISHER
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This Book is affectionately inscribed

TO

MARGUÉRITE AND JEANNE DE WITT,

OF VAL RICHEL, NORMANDY;

AND

FRANCIS MULOCK ANDERSON,

OF MAURITIUS.

PREFACE.

IN introducing to English children this charming picture of French family life, I think I am benefitting their elders too. We Britons are too apt to believe that French society is only as modern French novels make it appear; but this book—wherein the authoress has taken her pictures of both nature and human nature from that combination of the real and the imaginary, which, together, form the truest art—shows us that our neighbours across the Channel understand “home” as well as ourselves.

I have altered nothing, not even the proper names. If a book is worth translating at all, the translator’s duty is to reproduce it *exactly*; so that readers, like travellers, instead of trying to

adapt foreign ways into a weak imitation of their own, may throw themselves, honestly and heartily, into the fresh atmosphere around them and derive from it all the good they possibly can. No English children of any common sense will like my little French children the less as "Edouard" and "Lucie," than as Edward and Lucy ; and I believe Monsieur and Madame Bessard are just as true, loving, and loveable parents, as any "Mr. and Mrs. Jones" into which I might have travestied them.

And so I leave the book—which, if liked well enough, will be perhaps only the first of several more—to the warm little hearts by English firesides, doubting not that they will welcome their little French companions, and grow as fond of them all as the translator has done.

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CHAPTER

THE BLACK

"O H, nurse!" cried Lu
breathless into her r
what I've seen in the garden
cat."

"Probably one of the kitt
gardener; he said he would
alive. I'm glad of it!—these
everything."

"Please, nurse," Lucie cried
her eyes, "don't say that,
have it in my pinafore, poor l

"And you went into the
pose?"

"No; Charles saved it. O
shooting he saw me beside th

him. The kitten was trying to swim ; but it was too small : so he fished it out with the butt end of his gun. Charles says it is only a month old."

"And what are you going to do with it ?"

"I am waiting till mama comes in, when I shall ask her leave to keep it. It will eat all the mice in the house, and if there are not enough, I will give it some of my breakfast and my dinner."

So Lucie sat down on a chair near the front-door, in order to be quite sure of meeting her mother when she came in. It was now about five in the afternoon, at which hour Madame Bessard always went to the dairy to inspect the work of the day, and give her orders for the morrow.

M. Bessard had been a soldier, but having reached the rank of a lieutenant-colonel, he was wounded in Algeria, and obliged to renounce his profession. Being very far from rich, except in children, he determined to retire to his country estate, a farm called La Vacherie, and use the money he saved by thus giving up Paris life, in sending his sons to college. His wife, who cared little for worldly amusements, was delighted with

this arrangement, since it left her free to devote her entire time to the education of her one daughter. She was already the mother of four sons, the eldest of whom was fifteen years old. Her sole care was to look after their comforts and her husband's, a duty which very narrow means did not make too easy. Both parents laboured hard in the management of their farm; and if Lucie had not dreaded, with reason, the sad result of bringing her cat into a dairy, she might at once have known where to find her mother.

However, time slipped by, the dinner hour approached, and still Madame Bessard had not returned. Lucie fidgetted on her chair, while nurse put the dishes on the table, and thought no more of either the child or the cat. At last Lucie perceived her mother coming slowly along the path between the house and the farm, looking weary and pre-occupied, until her countenance brightened at the sight of her little girl.

"Run upstairs, child; we have scarcely time to dress. Get your frock—nurse has put it out ready, no doubt."

But Lucie only cried out eagerly, "Mama, may I keep my cat?"

"What cat?"

The child half-opened her pinafore. "This one, mama; isn't it pretty? Charles fished it out of the pond for me."

"We will see about the cat;—now, run upstairs. A nice figure you look with your wet pinafore. If these are the advantages of having a cat——"

"Oh, mama, it isn't pussy's fault. They wanted to drown her; she is quite dry now, I assure you. May I put her in my work-basket?"

"Beside your knitting-needles?—a pleasant place for her to live in. No; put her on your father's old foot-muff, which he uses no longer, and take your frock off, whilst I do my hair. I shall be dressed before you are half ready, thanks to the cat."

Lucie hastened to assure her mother she would not lose a single minute.

"And, meantime, you are making me lose ten. Hark! Marie is ringing the bell. I hear your father in his dressing-room, and the staircase

shakes under the clatter of the boys. I must go and look for Gustave."

While Madame Bessard was attending to her youngest, aged six, and usually put in charge of his eldest brother, Lucie arranged in the corner a bed for her kitten, which mewed so piteously, that out of sympathy, the little girl almost began to cry too.

"You are ill, my poor little darling," cried she. "Oh, what wicked folks they were that wanted to drown you. But be content now—I will be so good that mama will let me keep you. What are you crying for, poor pussy?"

And to comfort it, Lucie took the wet, dirty kitten in her arms, much to the injury of her pink frock, when her second brother, Edouard, ran into the room.

"Do show me your cat. Mama has just told Gustave that you have found a cat in the pond. Have you given it anything to eat?"

"No," said Lucie, astonished; "perhaps it is hungry."

"I should rather imagine so. It mews despe-

6 *A French Country Family.*

rately ; if it were big enough, it would jump at you, and eat you up. But that it will do by-and-bye. Cats are so false."

"Please, Edouard, don't say that before mama, or she might not let me keep it."

"Mama knows the fact well enough, it is in all our lesson-books. Meantime, false or not, I'll get it some milk from Marie, or else I'll ask mama for the key of the dairy."

Dinner cut short these grand projects, which made Madame Bessard laugh. The idea of Edouard's going, for the sake of a cat, to disarrange the perfect order of her beautiful dairy! But as poor pussy must have heard the dinner-bell, like the rest, Lucie was allowed to fetch from the kitchen a bowl of milk, which she drank up with an avidity that showed her bath in the pond had not taken away her appetite.

After dinner, the day turned out so fine, that instead of remaining indoors, M. Bessard proposed passing the evening in the wood. Madame Bessard declared she had too many stockings to mend ; but her sons seized each a pair, Lucie

stuffed the darning-cotton into her pockets, and the mother had only time to snatch up her scissors and other things not safe to confide to the care of these walking work-baskets. Soon the little party were all settled in the wood ; the boys threw the stockings into their mama's lap ; but when Lucie felt for the cotton—she blushed.

“My cotton, Lucie !”

The little girl did not answer. Madame Bessard lifted her eyes and saw Lucie fighting painfully with a little black ball ornamented with white, which struggled violently, and mewed with all its might.

Poor Lucie, wishing to give her kitten the pleasure of an evening in the wood, had taken and hid it under her linen cape, then, once or twice on the way she had amused herself with putting it into her apron-pocket, leaving its head outside. Alas ! she forgot all about the cotton, which was also in the pocket ! So the kitten, playing with it, got it twisted about its paws, and became at last perfectly furious.

Everybody burst out laughing, except the

mother. She, who never punished folly, but only naughtiness, called the perplexed child to her side, and gently told her she would not keep her kitten long if she made it so uncomfortable. Then bidding her hold it, she began to cut away the cotton ; but as soon as the little cat got one paw free, it used it to scratch Lucie's hands.

" Oh, you naughty thing !" said she, half-crying.

" Nay, my child, the kitten is not to blame if you will put it in such a queer place as your pocket. I wonder if it found any of the eatables you often carry there. But now it is all right—and you too. Run and pick up the fir-cones—see what a heap of them papa and the boys have gathered, enough to last us half the winter."

" Mama," said Lucie, a little comforted, " may I not gather a heap—myself alone—for your bedroom ?"

" Yes ; choose the biggest ; and you may come with the donkey to fetch them."

Upon which Lucie eagerly called to her brothers with the news.

" Oh," said Charles, " if we wait for the donkey,

what between papa's errands, and mama's, and the gardener's too, it will be weeks before we see the tip of its nose."

"But mama says we shall have it."

"All very fine; and just when we want the beast, sure enough somebody else will be wanting it too—papa to carry a load of earth, or cook to bring in the potatoes: the poor donkey is never idle but on Sundays; and then we may not use it."

"No," said Lucie, "because we are told in the commandments that on a Sunday our animals should rest as well as we."

"Stop," Edouard cried, "I have an idea! If we could but get a beast and a cart that nobody else could use!"

"Lucie's kitten, harnessed to Gustave's waggon," suggested Charles, satirically.

"Not a bit of it. I'll manage the matter; but I'll manage it alone."

"As you will, young mechanic; but if you have the cleverest head, I have the biggest fist, and when you want me, you know where to come for me," said Charles, with a lordly air.

"Children," called out M. Bessard, "it is quite time to go in ; and, Charles, some day soon I shall be felling these trees, when I shall see what use I can make of those fists which you are so proud of."

Charles blushed a little ; and Lucie ran after her kitten, which, trying to climb a young fir-tree, found itself lodged there in great distress. But Charles, who was as clever in climbing as any cat, and had arms much longer than its poor little paws, mounted after it, the tree cracking under his weight, and put the runaway safe in his blouse-pocket, where fortunately there was no darning-cotton. Lucie received her pet tenderly in her arms ; and all proceeded together to the house, where, as it was eight o'clock, she and Gustave went at once to bed, Charles and Edouard, having learnt their lessons, soon following.

Monsieur and Madame Bessard, free for the first time since six in the morning, sat quietly talking by the open windows, discussing chiefly the sayings and doings of their children during the day, and consulting together over the labour of the morrow—for everybody worked at La Vacherie.

CHAPTER II.

THE NEWFOUNDLAND DOG.

FOR some days, during play-hours, Paul Besard had wandered about like a troubled spirit. Edouard, his usual play-mate, had shut himself up in the coach-house, which he forbade anybody to enter. Now Paul was a good little boy, gentle, obliging, affectionate; but he could not keep a secret. He was a terrible chatterbox, and fancied his chatter interested everybody: so his brothers had resolved not to trust him. He, greatly mortified, hovered continually about the coach-house door, which Edouard kept always locked; and on going out confided the key to Denis, the groom and gardener. Paul vainly tried to corrupt Denis, and get a peep into the coach-house; but the man was inexorable.

"You would see nothing there, Master Paul—even I don't know what Master Edouard is about."

Poor Paul waited hopelessly, until one morning he perceived Edouard run out of the coach-house, leaving the door half open. He could hardly believe his eyes, and his heart beat so violently that he could scarcely descend the tree upon which he was perched: at last he reached the ground, and darted at once into the coach-house.

What did he there behold—but a little cart! It was solidly built, and hung upon the wheels of an old carriage in which Lucie had been drawn when a baby. Its form was not elegant; indeed, it was just a square box; but it moved easily, and was so light that the delighted little fellow prepared to drag it out into the yard, when he heard Edouard coming back at full speed, accompanied by the big watch-dog, which he had been to let loose.

Labrador was a magnificent dog of the Newfoundland breed, gigantic in size, yet perfectly gentle with the children, who had accustomed him to lend himself to all their whims: also he was a first-rate watch-dog—woe to the beggar who, after

dusk, came within the precincts of La Vacherie. But now, Labrador was apparently intended to be used as a horse, being harnessed with ropes carefully disposed and fastened to a leathern collar.

"What are you doing there, Paul?" cried Edouard, as soon as he saw him.

"You left the door open, I had nothing to do, so I went in."

"Oh, very well—I don't mind. My work is done now, so you can't blab of my secret. What do you think of the cart?"

"It is—very solid," said Paul, hesitatingly, "but—but—not quite like papa's carts."

"Of course not. It is only an old box, in which somebody sent us those prunes—which were very good, you know, though ours are better."

"Yes; because mama dries them herself. But what are you doing with Labrador?"

"I am going to make him draw my cart, and this evening we will go and fetch the fir-cones for mama. Didn't I say I would get a cart and horse that nobody else could make use of?"

"But we do make use of Labrador."

"Only as a watch-dog, not as a horse. But you'll see how well he will go."

The poor dog, who had rather a melancholy air, allowed himself to be attached to the shafts of the cart.

"Stop, I must fetch my whip," said Edouard, greatly pleased. "Mind Labrador till I come back."

Edouard ran indoors; bounded upstairs; heard Lucie calling him, but without giving himself the trouble to answer, sprang down again and darted off to the coach-house. It was high time he got there! Alas! the cart, Labrador, and Paul, were all struggling on the floor in a confused mass. Paul screamed; Labrador barked; the cart alone was dumb, but not the least unfortunate of the three.

Edouard, in a fury, struck both Paul and Labrador with his whip; and while he helped them to get up with one hand, with the other he felt for his cart—the front part of it had all come to pieces.

"What mischief you have done!" cried he an-

grily to his brother. "One can't turn one's back but you interfere and spoil everything."

Paul began to cry. "It isn't my fault; Labrador is not accustomed to stand quiet between shafts. I daresay he felt tired and wanted to lie down, and the cart fell upon him."

"And where were you, that you did the same?"

"I wished,—I thought—In truth, I just got into the cart—"

"Aye, that was it; I see!—Now, sir, if you ever dare to get into my cart without my express permission, you shall not come within a mile of it. I made it to carry mama's fir-cones, and not a fat little wretch like you. It will take me all day to repair this damage. Look here, Charles."

Fortunately, Charles, who just then came up, had a much stronger wrist than his brother's, and with half-a-dozen well applied hammer-strokes re-nailed the broken wood; and then advised Edouard to make it more secure with some pieces of strong cord. This time the cart seemed solid enough; they again harnessed Labrador to it, careful not to lose sight of him, lest he should once more take

it into his head to lie down ; and then the three boys left the coach-house in triumph.

Lucie, tired of hunting for her elder brothers, had condescended to accept Gustave's proposition that they should make a garden and a bower in a retired thicket, which had been left for the use of the children ; and was busy filling her apron with gravel in order to gravel the walks, when she heard the strokes of the whip, the outcries of the boys, and the rumbling of wheels.

" Gustave, Gustave, come here ! " and, running to meet her brothers, she was mute with surprise and admiration at sight of Labrador and the beautiful cart. " These are the wheels of my old carriage, and there is the old prune box ; I see the railway mark upon it. But what is it to be used for ? "

Gustave, less quick than Lucie, was greatly puzzled. Ideas came to him slowly, and he had to pause and think, while his livelier sister darted 27 direct to her point.

" Don't you see, it is the cart Edouard promised us to carry fir-cones. How good Labrador stands !

are you sure these old ropes don't hurt him, Edouard ? ”

“ Old ropes, indeed ! Lucie, you'll please to speak more respectfully of my harness. For Labrador, nothing hurts him. I'm off to mama to ask if we may go to-night to fetch the fir-cones.”

“ Not to-night ; we should have no time,” said Lucie.

“ And it will be so dark under the trees,” said Gustave.

Charles suggested lanterns—a procession by torch-light.

Paul doubted his father's permission for that, and proposed their going next day, as it was Thursday.

“ All days are Thursdays to Charles and me,” replied Edouard. “ It is our holidays ; but you little folk, who idle all the year round, you get no holidays.”

“ Edouard, I don't idle, indeed ! ” protested Lucie.

“ Bah ! girls never work like boys. I only wish you were at college.”

“ But I am too little ; only six years old.”

“ If you were twelve it would be just the same. No, no : men work in our way, and women in

yours. I shouldn't like to sew on buttons and mend shirts like mama."

Here Charles broke in, and asked if they were to stay chattering here or go and show the cart to their mother ?

"Very well, march on !" cried Edouard and Paul together ; and giving a touch of the whip to Labrador, who had laid himself down between the shafts with a resigned air, they arrived with a great noise and clattering in front of the little study, where Madame Bessard sat writing her letters. Lucie ran in breathless.

"Oh mama, do come and see our beautiful little carriage !"

The boys began all speaking at once.

"Isn't it pretty ? isn't it comfortable ? It is to fetch fir-cones out of the wood. Please mama, may we go to-morrow ; it's Thursday."

"Yes, yes, yes ; only don't quite deafen me, children. Edouard, I congratulate you. You have made useless things useful. Besides, I shall have the pleasure of informing your father that he has one more beast of burden in his stable."

"No, no, mama," cried the boys, laughing. "Labrador is our horse, ours entirely ; but we will sometimes lend him to you. Never to papa, who has quite enough of horses. Now, let us put up our carriage in the coach-house."

By unheard of good luck, in spite of the excitement of the charioteers, the chariot was deposited in safety ; and next day, at one o'clock, the children went in a body to fetch Labrador out of his kennel. Poor dog ! he dropped his ears despondently, as if foreseeing what was going to happen to him ; but Lucie's coaxings at last got him out ; he seemed fully to understand her entreaties. The children were accustomed to manage their own affairs, Charles, a big boy of fifteen, taking care of the little ones. They started for the wood : their lunch, carefully packed in a basket, being placed in the cart.

"Have we any glasses, Lucie ?" suddenly asked Paul.

"No : mama says we always break them ; but she has given us a cocoa-nut cup to get water from the stream."

"That's right, for the cart shakes dreadfully ; and the luncheon-basket has already made some fearful jumps."

Arrived at the heap of fir-cones, the basket was taken out of the cart, and everybody set busily to work. Gustave and Lucie did not do much : they were too little to throw the cones into the cart, and their brothers found it much easier to do the lading of it themselves, than to make use of the willing little hands that were always in the way. At last the younger ones took to gathering, while the elders loaded ; so the cart was soon filled, and everybody satisfied.

The labour was nearly done, when Charles, who since his fifteenth birthday had enjoyed the great honour of possessing an old silver watch which had belonged to his father, announced that it was time for lunch. Everybody sat down on the grass, and Lucie, who, small as she was, in virtue of being a girl, considered herself her mother's representative in domestic matters, began with dignity to unpack the basket. But at the first look therein she cried out—

"O dear! all our apricots are squeezed into jam!"

"Well," said Paul, "apricot jam is not bad."

"But we have no sugar?"

"Nonsense!" cried Charles; "do you think we shall get sugar when we go campaigning like papa? I only wish I could make some spoons with a bit of wood. How shall we ever fish out this queer jam with our fingers!"

However, with the help of a bit of bread and a stick, the squeezed apricots, served on leaves instead of plates, did extremely well; and were much enjoyed by the hungry children, who agreed that mama was quite mistaken in putting sugar into her jam; it tasted a great deal better without. Paul, however, insisted upon it that no preserves would keep without sugar, which reasoning was unanswerable.

Then the elder boys re-harnessed Labrador to go home; but their return was a much more difficult proceeding than their coming. The poor dog was unaccustomed to draw, and the road beyond the wood was very bad. However, the boys

pushed the cart behind, and Lucie, whip in hand, as a matter of form, coaxed Labrador on without striking him. At last the whole party arrived safely at home, and discharged their cart-load in the woodshed, after having obliged their mother, late as it was, to come out and admire the result of their proceedings.

CHAPTER III.

THE RETURN TO COLLEGE.

THE end of September approached, and La Vacherie was in all its glory. The little garden which surrounded the house was so resplendent with autumn flowers, that it gave the effect of a variegated island dotted in the middle of a wide green prairie. The hedge of dahlias which bordered it, and divided it from the fields, furnished Lucie daily with enormous nosegays for the parlour vases. As she was both careful and skilful, her mother had confided to her the arrangement of the flowers: and the little girl's country-life had given her a great faculty for noticing, in field or wood, any grasses or wild flowers that show well in bouquets, backed with garden flowers.

The parlour at La Vacherie was small, and the chintz curtains, of the same colour as the paper, were a little faded : the furniture-covers had been washed so often that their red hue was a good deal washed out : but taste and natural elegance conquered these little imperfections. Every time M. Bessard took his elder sons to any of the numerous chateaux round about, they always returned in the evening, saying to their mother, with a tender glance around them,

“ Ah, mama — nobody can arrange a room as tastefully as you ! ”

But the lovely days of late autumn, which completed the harvest so satisfactorily, weighed heavily upon the mother's heart : she counted them one by one, for she knew her boys must soon quit her.

Edouard saw his holidays end without much pleasure, but still with little regret. Absorbed in his studies — of which he was very fond — he enjoyed the life he led at Saint Barbe. He loved his masters — for he was one of their best pupils : and above all he loved his future career.

To be a pupil at the Ecole Polytechnique, and afterwards to enter a regiment of Engineers, seemed to him the supreme end of existence. He liked his family heartily, but he saw no necessity to tell them so, and he did not miss them when he was away.

Charles, on the contrary, whose nature was at once reserved and warm, found among his school-mates no compensation for his own kith and kin. He had for his mother that passionate attachment which eldest sons have sometimes—a mixture of infantile trust and protective instinct : and he suffered as much from being absent from her, and not able to help her in her daily duties, as he did from missing her as his constant confidante in all his thoughts and hopes. So more than once, during these last days of September, Lucie coming suddenly into her mother's room, would find her talking earnestly, nay tearfully, with Charles, who sat twisting her scissors round his finger, or rolling and unrolling her yard-measure, to hide his feelings.

In two years from now, Charles was to be entered at Saint Cyr, and his brothers thought it would be great fun to see him in his uniform, when

he came home for the holidays. But Madame Bessard sometimes sighed to think that of all her sons, the only one she could hope to keep beside her was Paul, whose character, at once firm and gentle, seemed to mark him out for an agricultural life. For little Gustave, he vowed he would be a sailor, though he had never yet seen the sea !

Lucie was very busy—assisting, or attempting to assist, her mother, in putting the boys' clothes in order for college. She even wished to mend their stockings, but Madame Bessard discouraged this proceeding, which would have necessitated the mending being done twice over, and advised her to confine her energies to sewing on buttons. This was so laborious an undertaking that the little girl had at last to stop—her cheeks all glowing and her tiny fingers aching. But still, when Lucie had once sewn a button on a shirt or waistcoat, the piece of stuff or linen might be torn away, and the button would remain firmly in its place.

“ You sew faster than I do, mama,” she said with pride one day, “ but you don't sew half so solidly.”

And when her brothers would bring her a buttonless coat, complaining that the tailor having failed, here was an opportunity for Lucie to succeed, she would set delightedly to work, with a needle as big as a shoemaker's, because she had not yet learned how to thread little needles.

At last the 5th of October came, and classes opened on the 7th. M. Bessard planned a day in Paris, that he and his sons might pay some visits to their relatives there. So at eight in the morning, Denis, dressed in his livery, and ignoring the fact that he was usually only a gardener, mounted proudly behind the old coach drawn by two farm-horses.

"You see," said M. Bessard to his wife, who was looking out of the window, "I am giving myself the luxury of driving a pair. God bless you, my love. I shall return on Thursday. Do not let your heart go down. Our sons are safe in God's hands."

"I will try my best," she answered, following him to the entrance, where the children were already assembled.

"Paul!" called out Edouard, condescendingly; "I leave you my cart. Take care not to break it, and use it now and then, that Labrador may not lose the habit of being a horse."

Paul promised—saying he would go and fetch sand for Lucie's garden-walks.

"Oh how nice!" cried Lucie. "May I go and help him?"

But Paul said it was too far, and mama would not allow it: she must content herself with helping Gustave to spread the sand on the walks.

"Very well," said Edouard, and then called out hastily for Charles.

"He is in the parlour with his mother," answered M. Bessard. "Edouard, you are in a terrible hurry to get away from us all!"

"Oh no! it's not that indeed, papa," answered Edouard, deeply blushing; "but it would be so provoking to miss the train."

M. Bessard said in a whisper to his son that he knew he was not really glad to leave home, but still he must not be so self-absorbed; he must think of his mother sometimes. To which Edouard

in a choked voice replied that he did think of her very often. And then Charles being summoned, and the trunks all ready, they must needs be gone.

"Paul, take care of your mother and Lucie," cried the father.

"And I, papa," asked Gustave, "what must I do?"

"Look after your brother and sister, and mama will look after everybody."

Madame Bessard kissed her two sons. Charles, pale, and with his lips tightly pressed together, jumped into the carriage without turning his head or answering a word to the good-byes of the little ones. For Edouard, he kept waving his handkerchief for a minute or more, after La Vacherie was quite out of sight. M. Bessard, respecting the silence of his elder son, kept up conversation with the younger. In about a quarter of an hour Charles began to say a word or two, to look out of the window, and speak of what they were going to do, and the people they should see at Paris. By degrees his grief abated; he thought always of his mother, but it was with less pain.

Mothers are not so easily consoled as sons. Paul, Gustave, and Lucie, when the coach drove off, ran to post themselves at a corner of the garden, where they had a good long view of the road. When it had quite disappeared, Paul, much disconcerted by the loss of his elder brothers, upon whom he always bestowed his company, whether they liked it or not, during their holidays, forlornly proposed to Gustave that they should go to the yew-tree at the corner of the field of oats, and cut off two branches to make bows.

"Papa told me it was the best wood for that; and how, long ago, when there were no guns invented, a king of France commanded that before every church should be planted a yew-tree, that everybody might have wood for bows."

"And is the yew which grows before our church one of these, I wonder?"

"How can I tell? Most likely when the tree died, people would plant another: but yews live a very long time I know. Now, come along."

When her brothers departed, Lucie said to herself that she would go and put in order the room

which Charles and Edouard had just left, and then her mother would not find it untidy.

Had the little girl been older, she would have guessed that the mother must have gone straight to her sons' room long ago. There Lucie found her, kneeling at the foot of Charles's bed—her head upon her hands. The child stopped—hesitating; then kneeling down softly beside her mother, she prayed with all her little heart that God would take care of her father and brothers—keep the boys well—and make them good. She waited patiently till Madame Bessard had finished her prayers. The mother rose, with moist eyes, and then first perceived her little daughter.

“Are you there, my darling? Were you looking for me?”

“No, mama. I only came to put my brothers' room in order, and save you trouble; and I made no noise, because I saw you were saying your prayers. Be content, mama. I will ask God every day to take care of Edouard and Charles.”

Madame Bessard smiled tenderly at her little girl, and began quietly to fold up the clothes which

her sons had cast off in favour of their school uniforms, and which were scattered about in that wonderful disorder which schoolboys only can attain to. Meanwhile Lucie gathered up in the middle of the floor all the rubbish which the two had accumulated in six weeks : tufts of dry grass, stones, bits of wood, pebbles, and flints.

“ Mama, what must I do with all these ? ”

“ Throw them away, my child. Get a basket, and we will carry them downstairs. The boys will not remember a single stone of them when they come back at Easter.”

Lucie sprang to the door, when she perceived a letter on the chest of drawers.

“ Mama, this is for you, there is no postage-stamp on it, and it is Charles’s writing. What a funny idea to write you a letter before he went away ! ”

“ My good son ! ” murmured the mother, opening the paper, which was full of love—the love which that morning the boy’s heart could not utter ; but he knew that his mother would find his letter at once if he left it in his room.

Lucie reappeared with a very heavy basket, which she dragged painfully up the narrow stair ; but in spite of its size it was soon filled, and out of the boys' relics, Lucie still had for her share two birds'-nests, and a superb branch of the spindle-tree, covered with beautiful berries, of which she wished to make a necklace for her doll.

Annette, the nurse, appeared at the door to strip the beds. She had seen all the children born, and her heart was almost as sore as her mistress's at the departure of the boys. Tears were in her eyes as she mounted the stairs to remove all traces of them, and reduce their garret to that perfect order which implies that nobody is expected. She saw Madame Bessard stand reading and re-reading her son's letter.

" Now, madame, you'll please go and lie down at once : you were up far too early. Mademoiselle will help me to arrange everything here."

" Annette, Charles left on the table a letter for me," said her mistress.

" Really ! Well, it's just like the dear lad. And

now, madame, do go to your room, for you are as pale as death."

"And, mama," cried Lucie, "I'll go and fetch you a cup of broth, for you have eaten nothing this morning, and papa charged me to take care of you."

"Very well ; but where are your little brothers ?"

"Gone for branches of yew to make bows of, and I am going to them presently. Only please do lie down, mama."

"Yes, yes ;" said Madame Bessard ; and went into her room. But when there, she immediately sat down to answer Charles's letter.

CHAPTER IV.

SNOW.

M. BESSARD returned from Paris, bringing the best possible news of his sons. Charles wrote regularly twice a week to his mother : Edouard's letters were generally to his father, to whom he spoke of his studies, putting to him puzzling questions in mathematics, and asking all sorts of advice, which much amazed Lucie.

" Edouard writes of nothing but arithmetic, mama. He must think of it all day and dream of it all night."

" At College there is no time for dreaming. Edouard goes to bed at ten and rises at five."

" I should much like to sit up till ten o'clock, as you do, mama ; but I would not like to be up at

five. Besides, you say seven is quite early enough for a little girl like me."

"Yes ; and eight o'clock is quite late enough to go to bed. Otherwise you would fall asleep over your dinner."

"And Gustave, too ?"

"Gustave's favourite time for sleeping is at his lessons. Come, my little son, have you nearly done for this morning ?"

Gustave declared that he knew his fable quite well, and began repeating, "'Old father Fox—old father Fox—'"

"'One day gave an expensive feast,'" said Madame Bessard, promptly.

"'And invited to dinner—to dinner—'"

"'And invited to dinner mother Goose,'" said Madame Bessard, shaking her head. "Ah, Gustave, you don't know your lesson.—How cold it is ; and the barometer is falling fast."

Here Paul came running in, and begged his mother to hear him his Latin grammar—the passive verb, "I am loved."

"It is all the same to me, my boy, as I don't

know Latin ; but I can just see if you are correct by the book. How lucky you don't come to me with your Greek likewise."

"No ; that's papa's business. How I wish I knew Greek like him without the trouble of learning it. And what use will Greek be to me, mama, if I am to spend all my life at La Vacherie ?"

Madame Bessard explained to Paul that it would cultivate his mind, and give him a taste for books, while it would not hinder his becoming as good a farmer as any of his neighbours.

"But then I like French books much the best. As for a language where I have to learn the alphabet as if I were a small child—Oh, look, mama, it is snowing !"

Here was a diversion. Lucie ran to the window in an ecstasy of delight. Gustave exclaimed, what beautiful snow-balls they would make, and how instead of a snow man, they might erect a triumphal arch, with an inscription on it written in large chestnuts.

"But first," suggested the mother, "there must

fall a little more snow, and it must be cold enough to freeze. So finish your lesson, my dear Paul. That will do. Go and write out your French verb for your father. And Lucie, bring your book here, directly."

But this morning the children did little—the snow absorbed all their attention. And M. Bes-sard, entering once or twice to consult his wife about some precautions against the sudden change of weather, distracted them still more. The snow thickened, and large flakes soon covered the garden like a beautiful white sheet.

Lucie began to be very uneasy for the fate of her doll, which she had left the evening before in her garden: yet she dared not ask leave to fetch it. Her lessons suffered for her trouble of mind; and her mother was just telling her for the third time that she would not put up with tasks so badly learnt, when the despair of the poor little girl burst out.

"Oh, my doll, my doll! My poor little daughter. She will be buried under the snow, and the wolves will eat her up. And she's crying, I hear her crying."

"What are you saying, silly child? Where is your doll?"

"I left her yesterday in my garden, mama. She was amusing herself so much. She did not wish to come in. She was playing at having dinner. And now she will catch cold—she will be laid up ill!"

Madame Bessard smiled. "Nonsense — learn your lessons now, and by and by we will see about your daughter."

Lucie, reading some comfort in her mother's eyes, began once more to learn her lesson, the hymn,

"O Father, whom my father worships ever,"

which often troubled her sorely because she could not quite understand it. Presently Madame Bessard left the room. Gustave, seated near the window, tried to learn his multiplication-table; but could not keep from watching the garden walks, which were slowly disappearing under the snow. There was a certain stone lying at the edge of the walk, which was not yet covered,

although the snow thickened more and more. Suddenly Gustave cried out—

“ See, mama is outside with her hooded cloak. Where can she be going ? To the farm, I think. No ; she is away towards the garden. What is she after, I wonder ? Lucie, I’ll bet you anything she’s gone to fetch your doll ! Now, I call that a little too much.”

“ Oh, mama is too good,” said Lucie. “ If only she does not catch cold.”

“ Snow never gives anybody cold. Look now, she is running ; and she has seized hold of your daughter, and is shaking her to shake off the snow ; and—there, I do believe she has my new whip in her hand, I must have left it on the table in the summer-house. What a mama we have got, to be sure !”

And the two little children ran to meet their mother, who, standing at the door of the little hall, was trying to shake off the snow which covered her mantle, and slip off her india-rubber shoes.

“ Dearest mama, you are too good ! Why didn’t you send us to the garden ?”

"Because I should never have got you indoors again, you would have been so much amused. Here is your child, Lucie—and, Gustave, take your whip, which papa brought you from Paris. A careful coachman—and still more careful mama!—You two are a pretty pair!"

"It looks more unkind for a mother to leave her child than a coachman his whip, out in the snow," said Gustave.

"Well, I grant you, it does make a trifling difference. Now, help me to take off my wet cloak. It is already dusk; we will go back into the parlour, and get the lamp. Paul, are you ready? Your father will be coming in soon, and you know, he does not like to find you behindhand."

"Yes, mama, I have just done, only I fear there is one mistake in my exercise. I don't remember the rule, and I can't find it in the grammar."

Paul's one mistake turned out to be not the only one; however, as he was but nine years old, his father was not severe, and having corrected his exercises and made him repeat his lessons, told him he might amuse himself till dinner-time. The three

children darted into their room in order to wash their hands, and get back speedily to the parlour. Madame Bessard followed Lucie, who slept in a little room next to her, whilst Gustave and Paul occupied one at the end of the passage. The boys had left their window open, and the snow had drifted in. Hearing their cries of delight, the mother entered, and found the two little scamps snow-balling one another. She soon put an end to this entertainment, which did not improve the furniture, plain as it was, and they all went downstairs together.

"It is much warmer here, mama. When will you let us have a fire in our bedroom?"

M. Bessard looked up—"Just in time, boys, to prevent the water from freezing in your ewers. Their breakage would cost more even than fire."

"But, papa," said Paul, laughing, "mama always takes the precaution to carry away our ewers bodily, so there's no danger, except for ourselves, which is quite another thing. If our blood freezes in our veins, of course it's of no consequence."

Thus jested they, with the fire bright, and the

curtains closed. After dinner the children gathered round the table, while the father read aloud. Lucie did not comprehend the book, nor believed that Gustave did either, though he listened with all his ears. "Voyages in Japan" had a great attraction for him, though half the words were far too long for him to understand.

At eight o'clock, when the children went to bed, they found a fire in both their rooms, for the thermometer stood at ten degrees below zero, and the snow fell faster than ever.

"We must go out in the sledge the first thing to-morrow morning, and open a road," said M. Bessard, returning from his last round to the farm. "I find the court-yard already impassable. I hate snow, when it is as thick as now. Each day quite ruins me, for the six horses have nothing to do, nor the carters either. Machines at least don't eat their heads off all the while they are standing idle."

Madame Bessard answered, smiling, that, although as yet the thing was not invented, she fully expected to see one day at La Vacherie—a

wagon moved by steam. "But, hark! I hear a knock at the door, only so feeble—it sounds like a child's knocking."

"Stay here, my love, and I will go and see."

As he went, M. Bessard almost stumbled over Denis, who was running as fast as the thickness of snow allowed.

"Master," cried he, "a poor woman, with a child in her arms, has fallen down against our door. She had another child with her—the child that knocked, I think—but I have no idea what has become of it, and I can't see it at all now."

"Stop, Denis, and we'll go and look—Hélène"—calling hurriedly to his wife—"make the kitchen fire as big as you can, and get plenty of blankets."

Madame Bessard had already darted to snatch up her keys. Annette and Marie lit the fire, and made some water hot in a trice. By this time, Denis and his master came in, carrying a poor fainting woman, whose little boy followed, clinging to M. Bessard's coat. In another minute, the poor woman had her wet shawl taken off, her feet put into hot water, and was wrapped from head



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to foot in warm blankets. Annette tried to take from her a little baby, which seemed even more dead than the mother, but her stiff arms held it too tightly. Madame Bessard, standing over her with a cup of broth, poured some spoonfuls between her pallid lips. She opened her eyes, and, looking round, perceived Lucie, who had crept into the kitchen half-dressed.

Awakened by her mother's sudden entrance into her room, by the sound of steps and voices about the house, which was small enough for everything to be heard, and wondering very much what was happening, Lucie put on her shoes and stockings and her little dressing-gown, and crept downstairs unobserved. When she saw she was found out, she cast an appealing look — quite irresistible — upon Madame Bessard, and then, with an easy mind, crept beside the poor little boy, who, while the others were occupied with his mother, had been a little neglected. He stood quietly crying beside the fire, the heat of which seemed to comfort him very much.

“Would you like a cup of broth, little boy?”

asked Lucie, taking up the cup which her mother had placed on the table.

The little boy, opening the biggest eyes, said, "Yes."

"Softly—when one is very hungry one must not eat too much at once. Are you warm now?"

"Yes," again said the little boy.

Meantime Annette prepared, with mattresses and coverlets, a very good bed by the fire-side. When the poor woman recovered her senses, she told them how she had been travelling on to her mother's house, not very far off, when she had been overtaken by the snow. With one child in her arms and another hanging to her gown, she could not get on at all, but fell down, half-frozen, at the door of La Vacherie.

Madame Bessard would not let her talk any more, promising her that next day, if the snow abated, she should be driven in a cart to her mother's cottage, which was about half a league distant. Then leaving the poor woman and her children in Annette's care, the mother took Lucie

in her arms to carry her to bed. The little girl was now as broad awake as if it was day.

"Mama," said she, "the snow, which was such fun to us, was anything but fun to this poor woman. Did you notice, the boy's feet were all frozen? It is because he has such holes in his shoes. Mama, I think my old boots, those which you have had patched to give away, will fit him very well. May I try them on him to-morrow morning?"

"We shall see, my child. Now go to bed, once more; and thank God for having given us a good house, and a warm fire, and also for having sent us to-night one of His poor."

"Do the poor all belong to God, and do they all love Him?"

"Not all, unhappily; but they still belong to Him, because He loves them. Now, my little daughter, go to sleep, and you shall say good-bye to the poor boy before he leaves to-morrow."

Lucie never forgot a promise made to her. At half-past seven in the morning she was down in the kitchen, looking for Denis, who was having his breakfast there, before harnessing the horses to the

sledge, which was to open a way through the snow. The poor woman, warmed and strengthened, hardly looked like the same person as last night, and her little boy had grown quite talkative.

By nine o'clock, the route was opened complete; a horse was put to the cart, and Lucie, who, trying her boots on her *protégé*, discovered to her extreme pleasure that they fitted him quite well,—bade him good-bye, promising soon to come and see him.

Meantime, Gustave, not to be outdone, held out to the little fellow a great slice of bread and butter from his own breakfast, saying, "Take that—I'm not hungry."

Paul, saying nothing, cut his own slice in two, and gave a good half of it to his brother.

"God's poor people ought to go away very content," said Lucie to her mother.

Madame Bessard kissed her without making any reply.

CHAPTER V.

WINTER-TIME.

THE weather continued extremely cold. Already for quite a fortnight had the snow lain thick on the ground ; and the children had made of it triumphal arches and pyramids without end. One morning Lucie entered her mother's room, her face red with cold, her cloak covered with snow, and her gloves full of water, thanks to the icicles which hung on them, and, beginning to melt, dropped on the floor.

"Oh mama !" cried she, "may we take the big linen-basket ; that which has two handles ?"

"What for ?"

"Paul has found in the wood-shed a very little sledge, which was used for dragging along trunks

of trees ; he wishes to put the basket on the top of it, and then we will go out for a drive in the snow. He will harness Labrador to the sledge : won't it be great fun, mama ? ”

“ Not for Labrador, certainly. But I will lend you the donkey, if you will promise only to drive your sledge over roads already cut in the snow.”

Lucie jumped for joy. “ Thank you, thank you, mama ; and when all is ready I will call you.”

So Lucie ran off to tell her brothers the good news. They all three rushed into the laundry, to the great consternation of Annette, who was a little indignant at Madame Bessard's indulgence, especially when she saw the boys begin to drag away her clothes-basket. She detained them while she covered it inside with an old quilt.

“ At least don't dirty the basket more than you can help,” said she, crossly.

But in spite of her irritation, she couldn't help looking out of the window to see them pass. Paul and Gustave carried, not without difficulty, the huge basket, which Lucie also tried to hold with

her little hands. A scream of delight resounded from all three when it was placed safely on the sledge.

"Poor little souls!" said the good nurse, smiling to herself, as she returned to her work.

The basket was solidly attached to its foundations, and then Madame Bessard was called.

"Mama, come and see Lucie's triumphal chariot. Gustave is gone to fetch the courser."

Madame Bessard went to the window: the two boys harnessed the ass as if they had been long accustomed to such work; presently all was ready.

"Mama, won't you come down to see us off? Lucie is well muffled up."

In fact, so anxious were they that their sister should not catch cold, that they had got from the farm some sheep-skins, which were put at the bottom of the carriage in very cold weather, and with these they had lined the basket completely. Lucie, with her pretty red-and-white face, and her thick black jacket and little blue hood, fancied herself a fairy princess in this novel sort of equipage. Her mother burst out laughing at the sight,

then hastily wrapping herself in a thick mantle, she descended to see the cavalcade move off. It included Labrador, who having been let loose, leaped backwards and forwards among them all, "like a jockey," the children said. The two boys walked one on each side of the ass. Lucie would have given up her place, but Paul laughed at the idea of seeing Gustave and Lucie leading the donkey while he rode in the carriage; and Gustave always liked to do exactly the same thing as Paul.

When the children had disappeared along the field-road, Madame Bessard. stood a minute to look at the view, always new and beautiful to her eyes. Accustomed for so long to garrison towns or military stations in Algeria, it was not till her husband had definitely settled here that she had spent a winter in her native France, and in the country; and nature even at this dead time of year was to her still full of the charm of novelty. It was very cold, but then the bareness of the trees made the views so extensive; each frost-laden branch glittered in the sunshine, and the little



WINTER SCENE.



mounds of earth or stones, covered with snow, were so exquisitely, purely white. Madame Bes-sard forgot the weather, and all her housework also ; until her husband, coming behind her, laid his hand on her shoulder.

"Look at your landscape from inside the house, if you please," said he, laughing ; "else you will certainly catch a cold on the chest, like that most delicate young person Lucie's doll. How comes it you are out at this hour, you who are not used to idle about ?" added he, as he took his wife by the arm, and drew her into the house.

"I had gone down to please the children, who are taking a drive in my clothes-basket, and I stayed a minute to look about me. Henri, how lovely are all God's works !"

"And His mercies are over all His works," added her husband, reverently ; "as well we both know. But I will leave you to your rag-heap there ; I see you are in the very thick of preparations for New Year's Day. It is very necessary this winter,—our poor folks will feel the cold so much—and everything is specially dear."

In truth, Madame Bessard's room was just like a shop. The part of Normandy where La Vacherie was situated is a poor district ; its rich inhabitants spend the winter in Paris, and there is no one left to administer charity to the poor. Besides, really to help the poor, one must know their needs. Madame Bessard was not rich, and the five children were a heavy drain on their father's purse, however much they increased his happiness. Nevertheless, the treasures poured forth each year from the bounty of La Vacherie showed how much can be done with a good will, even without much money.

At the end of each season, when Madame Bessard put aside worn-out clothes ; those which could no longer pass from Charles to Edouard, from Edouard to Paul, from Paul to Gustave, nay, to which even Lucie had given the finishing stroke, never disappeared definitely. The clever hands of the mother of the family cut out, planned, mended still. A greatcoat was transformed into two little waistcoats ; the flaps of an old coat made a good cap ; torn and worn shoes were sent to be patched

by the village shoemaker ; and odds and ends which would come in for nothing else grew into patchwork counterpanes, at which Lucie sewed with the utmost zeal. She also expended great energy upon the buttons and strings of flannel vests and night-caps, which her mother manufactured out of her own old garments. All these things were gradually amassed in a chest, until the end of December.

To-day then was the great era, and Lucie had been ready to renounce her drive in the clothes-basket in order to assist, as soon as she saw her mother amidst these heaps of New Year's parcels ; but Madame Bessard was rather glad of a little repose to do her work, without the doubtful aid of her willing daughter. For Lucie had favourites among the poor people, and would not always let her mama decide with strict justice how the gifts should be bestowed.

When the children returned triumphant from their airing, Madame Bessard was fastening, with a sigh, the last ticket to the last packet of clothes.

"Have you quite done, mama?" asked Lucie eagerly, running in.

"Yes, my darling, unless you have something to spare in your closet. It would be very useful to me this year, for I must have two more pairs of shoes, a coverlet, and two flannel petticoats ; and I have nothing. And no money neither," added she, in a low voice.

Lucie hastily took off her cloak. "Mama, what have you got for the Martins ?"

"Wool stockings and an old knitted vest, but I want besides a pair of shoes and a coverlet."

"And old Mother Levieux ?"

"She shall have one of your counterpanes."

Lucie stood a minute, looking at her old cloak which she had just taken off. "Mama, it seems to me that this is not so bad after all. I could easily do without a new one."

"No, my child ; consider this is its fourth winter, under one form or another."

"But in winter we never see a creature, and for spring I have my grey bournous ; besides, if we go into the town, I have my tartan shawl, with my jacket underneath it, to keep myself warm."

Madame Bessard asked, smiling, what her little girl meant by all these wonderful arrangements ?

Lucie began to blush. "Mama, I was thinking that the money you would spend upon my new cloak would buy petticoats, shoes, coverlet, and all. How much would the cloak have cost ?"

"Twenty-five francs, nearly."

"Well, then : you see, mama, the petticoats cost five francs ; twice five makes—makes—ten ; the shoes will be four francs ; twice four, that's eight ; ten and eight are eighteen, that will come to—come to—Oh ! please mama, do help me ?"

"Twenty-four francs. Capitably reckoned."

"Then—oh, please do it. Nobody need know. Papa and the boys will never find out whether I have a new cloak on or an old one, and I shall be so happy."

"I believe it, my darling. And this is a hard winter for the poor. I have got a knitted wool cap for the little boy, whose mother was lost in the snow at our door, you remember ? We will take it to him if the snow permits ; it is not very far. And I have also got a quilted cloak for the baby."

"Oh, mama, what a pity we can't drive there in the clothes-basket ! it would take us anywhere. Paul took me all across the river."

"Across the river ! that was not in our bargain."

"But, indeed, it is quite safe, and the ice so solid. Paul would skate, if only he had skates, he said."

"Don't tell him, Lucie ; but he will get a pair for his New Year's gift. When I was looking in the presses for something to give him, I put my hand upon an old pair of your father's. So I gave them to Denis, who will arrange the straps so as to fit Paul, and brighten the steel with glass paper. They will quite satisfy Paul, I think."

"He will be delighted. And Gustave, what does he get ?"

"A new cap ; his straw hat is no longer presentable."

"Then, mama, will you give it to me ?"

"If you like ; what will you do with it ?"

"Oh ! I will sew it carefully over, and then I will cover it with a piece of black glazed calico belonging to my doll. She wants it no longer :

it was the cover of her table when I gave her writing lessons, and she spilt the ink so much ; but she doesn't do that now. So I shall use the calico for the cap, and bind it with black ribbon, and give it to little Louis Courant."

"I suppose you reckon on my fingers to execute all your plans?" said the mother, smiling.

"Perhaps. But meantime, may I help you in putting back all these parcels into the press?"

"Yes : only don't take off the tickets, and put by the list all safe. Where are your brothers all this while?"

"Gone to unfasten the clothes-basket and restore it to Annette. She scolded us so for taking it away. Still she could not help laughing when she saw us return in a grand trot. Before the house it is easy enough to get on, but down the field-road we found many places where there was only room for Paul and the donkey ; Gustave had to mount on its back. Do you know, mama, we found footsteps of hares, rabbits, and even of mice, on the snow ; and we saw the track of the mice's tails. Wasn't it funny? There now, your parcels

are all tied up, mama, and I'll go for my penknife to cut the strings, all neat and proper."

So the little chatterbox ran away, not giving a single thought to the new mantle which she had so cheerfully sacrificed.

CHAPTER VI.

NEW YEAR'S DAY.

FOR a week past the evenings at La Vacherie had been a sort of constant torment to Monsieur and Madame Bessard. Their children were accustomed to make use of old toys as the mother did of old clothes — all that could be mended of the broken playthings of the year were given to the poor village-children on New Year's Day. Besides, Paul, who was rather clever with his hands, had instituted a manufacture on his own account of whips, fishing-lines, kites, for the boys ; while Lucie fabricated for the girls beautiful balls made of fragments and ends of Berlin wool. However, Madame Bessard not having worked tapestry for many years, her stock of these ran short ;

but Lucie was an ingenious young person, and when she began begging from the lady-workers of the neighbourhood for the ends of wool which otherwise would have been thrown into the fire, nobody refused her. Indeed she often received gifts of whole skeins—a little faded or of some useless colour ; and these her mother appropriated, and knitted them into mittens for babies too young to trouble themselves about worsted balls. And oh ! what a quantity of paste and glue—what scraps of paper and broken ends of straw, cumbered the table during the week between Christmas Day and the New Year !

It was now Friday, and New Year's Day was on a Tuesday.

Paul had stolen from his mother some bits of calico, cut cross-wise ; and of these he was making, surreptitiously, a kite for Gustave, who, knowing nothing of the matter, nevertheless was always guessing so very near the truth, that Paul used to redden to the tips of his ears.

Lucie also had a secret.

“ Lucie,” said her mother, “ what are you mud-

dling over in that corner, where you cannot possibly see anything clearly ?”

The little girl answered with a beseeching look, “ Oh yes, mama, I can see perfectly well.”

“ Mama,” cried Gustave, “ Lucie is making the funniest thing—it is a ——”

“ Hold your tongue, sir ;” and Lucie, blushing, gave her brother a sound slap : at which he began to cry.

“ I’m sure, Lucie, I never told what it was—because—because—I really don’t exactly know.”

“ Lucie, leave your work and come and speak to me.”

The little girl obeyed her mother at once, coming forward with drooped head. But in the depth of her heart she was not a bit sorry for what she had done ; she thought she had full right to punish Gustave for the vexation he had caused her.

“ My child,” said Madame Bessard, “ you have one great fault : you cannot bear to be contradicted. Gustave was wrong in speaking of your secret ; but perhaps you had never told him that it was a secret ?”

"Yes, yes, mama—indeed I had!"

"Then he ought to have thought twice before he spoke. But tell me—if you are sufficiently out of your ill-humour to be able to judge fairly—which do you think has been the most naughty of you two?"

Lucie said—speaking between her teeth, hot and angry,—“I’m not naughty. I’ve done Gustave no harm: I only slapped him for telling my secret.”

At this her father rose and said sharply, “Go into the dining-room: I allow no arguing here.”

However much it cost her, Lucie was always accustomed to obey: she went towards the door, but so slowly that in two steps M. Bessard had overtaken her, pushed her gently into the dining-room, and shut her in. There was a moment of silence, and then two or three loud kicks against the door announced that the little girl, left alone, had given full play to her passion. Madame Bessard did as she invariably did in similar cases: she allowed the child’s fury to evaporate. When, concealed by the darkness, Lucie had screamed and cried

till she was weary, she usually came to her right self again—asked her mother's pardon, and was truly repentant. But a war of words only excited her wrath without making her conscious of her fault—she was more sensible to the misery of solitude than to a thousand good reasons.

Her cries still continued : but the parents determinately made conversation between themselves without appearing to hear anything. Her two little brothers, each in his way, showed deep sympathy for Lucie. Paul continued to work at his kite ; but from time to time he cast sad looks at the dining-room door, and imploring ones towards his mother. Gustave began collecting the bits of velvet and cloth which had been the first ground of dispute, and arranged them in Lucie's basket ; then sitting on the ground, with his hands on his knees, he awaited, with the air of a culprit, his sister's deliverance from captivity. Madame Bes-sard saw and understood the little fellow ; she knew he felt himself to blame for having so irritated Lucie, and was sure, in his prayer that night, to remember it.

"Mama," said Paul at last, "Lucie is quite quiet now ; may I go and fetch her ?"

"Stop a minute, my boy. Lucie, will you be good ?"

Lucie answered softly from behind the door, "Yes, mama."

"Then, Paul, go for her."

Paul leaped triumphantly to the door, followed by Gustave a little in the rear ; for he feared Lucie had not forgotten his offence towards her. The little girl re-appeared with swollen eyes and a choked voice, but very penitent. Silently she laid her head on her mother's lap, and crouched down beside her.

"It is a great pleasure to be naughty, isn't it, Lucie ?" said M. Bessard. "It procures one so many advantages."

"No, papa," said Lucie, in the lowest possible tone.

"I assure you, my dear, if all this is any satisfaction to you, it is not for the rest of us. Here, for the last quarter of an hour, your two brothers have looked the picture of dismay, and, I need not

say, your mother and I have been miserable at being obliged to punish you. But if we were to let you grow up like this, I don't know what you would come to."

"It is quite true, papa," said Lucie.

"Listen, child; shall we make a bargain with you? If, for one month, you will deprive yourself of the extreme pleasure of going into a passion, I will give you a 'discretion.'"

"What is a discretion, papa?"

"Ah! you want to know your reward before trying to get it! Well, a discretion means that I will confide myself to your discretion: I will promise to give you a present, anything you like to ask for."

"With discretion—not *indiscretion*," interrupted Madame Bessard.

"Be content, mama; I will ask for nothing that is very dear. And so, papa, we agree that I am not to get angry all through the month of January."

"Since to-morrow is the 29th of December, why not begin on that day? Only fancy! from the

29th of December till the 29th of January, and not a cloud on Lucie's sky!"

"Oh, papa! you said I was not to go in a passion; but won't you allow me to be just a little cross sometimes? I never can keep in good temper for a whole month!"

"Why, your mother is in good temper all the year round; and I never give her a 'discretion.'"

"Oh, but," said Gustave, "mama is a grown-up person."

Paul insisted that this could not be the reason, since Annette and Marie—both grown-up people—were often out of temper, both of them. "It must be," added he, sagely, "because mama is—mama."

"That fact is incontestable," replied Madame Bessard. "I advise you never to advance less doubtful statements, and then you will be always right."

"Don't laugh at Paul," added the father. "He knows well enough what he meant to say. Lucie, I will allow you to be occasionally in bad humour—if you will keep it entirely to yourself. Externally we must have neither rage nor grumbling.

I shall ask your mother each night how the day has passed."

"Oh, I will tell you myself, papa !" cried Lucie, earnestly.

"Very well ; I trust to your honour. Now go back to your mysterious labours in the corner, and none of us will ask you a single question till New Year's Day."

On the Monday all was ready, and the drawing-room was filled with ticketed parcels.

Now the village nearest to La Vacherie, although much scattered, as is the case in all Norman villages, where each cottage is surrounded by an orchard of cider-apples, was yet near enough for Madame Bessard and her children to go from house to house distributing their gifts. Of course, they knew the wants of all their poor neighbours, but this was no reason for a public revelation of the same, which might not have been agreeable to the objects of their charity. So at eleven in the forenoon, the little cart, drawn by the donkey, was at the door, and into it were thrown all the parcels, together with a number of loaves of milk-

bread which Marie had baked over-night. Paul took the ass's bridle, and everybody started off, except M. Bessard, who pretended that if he went he should frighten the whole village, and that his workmen would think he came to reproach them for losing their time in a holiday.

The cottage of the Martin family was first visited. Madame Bessard had not seen them lately; but when she did, she thought with pleasure of the big parcel awaiting them, increased by Lucie's self-denial in the matter of the cloak. The grandmother, eighty years old, bed-ridden with rheumatism, lay shivering under two coverlets so thin that they were not half equal to the one heavy counterpane which Lucie hastened to spread upon the bed. The little boy, son of the "frozen woman," as the children still called her, ran before them, his little head tied up in an old rag, and when this was exchanged for a knitted cap, he thought himself so handsome that he went seeking everywhere for a basin of water in which to see himself. As he found only ice, and there was no looking-glass in the house, he took possession of his grand-

mother's saucepan, filled it with water, and therein contemplated his own charms at his ease.

In going from house to house, the cart gradually became empty ; it grew late and very cold, and Madame Bessard was just mounting Lucie and Gustave in place of the bundles, when she perceived her husband coming towards them.

" Make haste home," said he ; " a big box has just arrived from Paris, and I am dying to know what is inside it."

" A box ! a box !" cried all the children, giving the poor ass heavy strokes with the whip to make him go faster. " Who does it come from ?"

" I fancy from Paul's godfather. We shall see if its whole contents belong to Paul."

Denis was at the door ready to take charge of the ass, who, poor beast ! in the general excitement ran a chance of being not only ill-used but neglected, and everybody rushed into the hall. The box was there—and a very big one—solidly nailed up, apparently ; but at the first touch of the boys it unnailed itself easily.

" Papa ! you have been opening it !"

"Well, I was obliged to pass the time in some way ; but I assure you I have not looked inside it. See there."

At first they only saw ticketed parcels. Then Paul drew out a great bundle of cloth.

"It is for me! Blue cloth! I shall have a blouse—a blouse of cloth! Oh! what happiness!"

"And," said Lucie, "I have this frock of grey merino."

"And I have a blouse like Paul's!" cried Gustave in delight.

"These books are for your mother and me, apparently," said M. Bessard. "And look! here are still some bon-bons—directed to Paul."

"Oh, how good uncle is!" exclaimed all the children. "Only I wish Charles and Edouard had something also!"

"Edouard wrote to me that your uncle has given him a mariner's compass, and Charles some splendid books. By the bye, here is a letter for mama from Charles ; the postman left it only three hours ago ; but you were so busy with your presents."

"Papa," entreated Paul, "may I go and try my new skates on the pond?"

"What, to-night? No; it is too cold—stay in doors. And now, Lucie, give me that mysterious present that I know is waiting for me, according to promise."

"Ah, papa! you are in far too great a hurry—I won't give it till dinner-time, when you'll find it under your table-napkin."

"But I can't wait, my little girl—I can't indeed."

Lucie laughed, and ran out of the room, but soon returned, bringing a pen-wiper of the queerest shape. The poor little damsel had wished to imitate a butterfly; but as she was determined to carry out her enterprise alone, without taking her mother into confidence, the result was rather peculiar. Her father did not tell her that her pen-wiper was more like a toad than a butterfly, but he enraged her a little by pretending he could not find its wings. Lucie insisted upon it that her butterfly was a species from America with which her father was unacquainted, but which she had often found described in books of travel. The end

of the discussion was, that the pen-wiper butterfly was carried away in triumph, and solemnly installed on M. Bessard's bureau, with this notification :—

"Large American butterfly, newly discovered by the celebrated traveller Mademoiselle Lucie Bessard, cousin of Madame Ida Pfeiffer."

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LUCIE WATCHING FOR THE POSTMAN.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LITTLE SISTER.

LETTERS usually arrived at La Vacherie about eleven in the forenoon, and Lucie had a habit of stationing herself, after morning lessons were done, at a window whence she could see the postman coming. At her first glimpse, she ran at full speed to meet him. It was such a pleasure to be the first to bring mama a letter from Charles or Edouard !

It being now February, the days were lengthening, and Lucie thought incessantly of her birthday, the first of March. Then she would be seven years old, and quite a grown-up person. While waiting for the postman, she came back often to chatter to her mother, who was writing a letter.

Usually people object to conversation while writing, but mothers are forced to put up with these inconveniences.

"Mama," said Lucie, "when I am seven years old, may I have a knife at dinner?"

"What do you want to do with it?"

"To cut my meat—like other people."

"And your fingers also?"

"Oh, no, mama: you shall see how cleverly I will manage. I have often used Gustave's knife, and never done myself any harm with it."

"Well; we shall see presently."

After a short silence Lucie began again.

"The postman is very late to-day. I hope there will be a letter from Charles."

"And I hope there will be news of your Aunt Marie."

"Mama, how old is cousin Pauline?"

"Six months younger than you."

"Then she will be nearly six years and a half old. I should so much like to see her. It is very provoking not to have a little sister. I wonder, mama, why God sent you so many little boys?"

"Which of your brothers would you like to exchange for a sister?"

Lucie reflected a little. "Well, mama, I don't know. Not Charles : he is too good for me ; and then he is the eldest, and you love him so much. Nor Edouard ; for during the holidays he mends all my broken playthings. Certainly not my Paul, who is to help papa in his old age. Perhaps, if Gustave had been a little girl—but then my doll would have had no papa. Ah ! mama, the only chance is for you to have a little girl in addition to me."

"Thank you, my dear ; but you alone are quite sufficient. Look ! the postman is crossing the meadow."

"How stupid of me not to see him sooner," cried Lucie, springing down the staircase in three bounds, without stopping to put on her cloak. All smiling, the postman gave her a heap of letters, with which she ran back in haste.

"Mama, here is a letter from Charles, and another from cousin Leon, and—and—"

Madame Bessard did not speak. She had let

her hands drop on her knees, and looked straight before her without seeing anything.

"Go and fetch your father," she murmured, at last.

Lucie, terribly frightened, ran off, quick as an arrow, to the farm. Half-way there, she met her father, walking rapidly, with a troubled air, and an open letter in his hand. Lucie ran to him.

"Papa, come quick : mama sent me to fetch you. I don't know what is the matter with her. She does not cry ; but she looks so miserable."

"Go in, my child, and leave your mother alone with me. Your Aunt Marie is dead," said M. Bes-sard, in a broken voice.

"Aunt Marie dead ! Oh, poor mama !"

Lucie, holding her father's hand, followed him to the door of her mother's room, then, when he had gone in and shut the door, she seated herself on the staircase outside, and hiding her face in her hands, tried to imagine that Aunt Marie whom she had never seen, and who was now an angel in heaven.

Madame de Léonsac was the youngest sister of

Madame Bessard. Married, later in life, and also to a soldier, she had accompanied him to Algeria just when her sister quitted that country. There, a little daughter had been born to her: she had lost her husband, and had come back to France to die. In landing at Marseilles, she had written to her sister that she hoped to come for some months to La Vacherie with her little Pauline—just for a short breathing-time, before she decided on her future plan of life. But a long-standing heart-disease, developed by her late grief, had carried her off at the age of thirty-five. One evening she was almost well—the next morning she was dead.

In about an hour, M. Bessard opened the door of his wife's room, and called softly, "Lucie."

The little girl ran quickly up-stairs, and timidly raising her eyes to her father, asked, "May I go and kiss poor mama?"

"Yes, my child, only just run and tell Annette to pack up my travelling-bag: I don't want to trouble mama with it."

"Are you actually going away, papa?" cried

Lucie, for the moment astonished, and a little indignant at this.

"Yes ; I am going to fetch Pauline. Your Aunt Marie has left her to your mother's care."

"Papa, I am so—" glad, she was going to say ; but stopped and added, "I will try to love her very much."

M. Bessard comprehended the double feeling which agitated his little daughter. He put his hand gently to her shoulder, and stooped to kiss her. She hung on his neck, and so he carried her into the room, where, seeing her mother very pale, and with swollen eyes, Lucie unwound her arms from her father, and came and knelt by her side. Madame Bessard embraced her daughter in silence—Lucie kissed her mother's hands.

"You will love Pauline, my child, won't you?"

"Just as you loved Aunt Marie, mama."

"May God not take her away from you, then!"

And Madame Bessard, hiding her face, began to weep as her little daughter had never yet seen her. Lucie could only kiss her without uttering a word. At length, making a violent effort, Madame

Bessard raised herself, and entering her husband's dressing-room, desired Lucie to go in search of her brothers, and tell them papa was leaving home. "Tell them also the reason," added she, in a low voice.

Lucie easily found Gustave, who was occupied in hunting rats in the granary ; but Paul had departed on a grand expedition. He had announced in the morning that he had seen some willows in bud near the stream, about a quarter of a league from the house, and that he meant to go during play-time to fetch some to ornament mama's flower-stand. Lucie dared not go after him, it was so far : so she wandered about miserably, up and down the walk which led to the stream, until Paul reappeared. Then she ran to him, and told him the sad news.

"Papa is starting off at once to bring back Pauline ;" she added, "mama says Pauline must be our little sister."

"Yours, if you like," said Paul ; "but for me one sister is quite enough. Besides, I can't love people that I don't know."

"But, Paul, you soon will know her. And only think, she is all alone, without either father or mother."

"Oh, I understand well enough that papa ought to bring her here; and I will love her as a cousin, but as my sister—that is quite another thing."

Lucie, half indignant at Paul's hard-heartedness in the matter of Pauline, and half grateful for his tenacity of affection towards herself, knew not what to reply, and the two children reached home in silence. The carriage was already at the door: M. Bessard had to meet at Vire the diligence which would take him to St. Lô, the nearest railway-station—but far enough; so that he could not possibly reach Paris until next day. Madame Bessard silently insisted on packing his things herself, to the great discontent of the affectionate servants.

"I shall be back in three or four days, I suppose," said M. Bessard to his wife. "I wish you could have gone with me; but it would never do to leave the children."

"Oh, no, impossible. Return as soon as possible.

Take care that our—our daughter, does not catch cold on the journey.”

“Yes—be content.” And stooping over his wife, M. Bessard whispered a few words in her ear.

Madame Bessard raised her head with a grateful look. Then she remembered the weary days that must pass before her husband could return to comfort her for the sister she had lost ; and pressing his hand once more in a silent good-bye, she hurried back to her room.

There, after a brief time of quiet and prayer, she rose stronger and calmer : hearing some one stirring in Lucie's room. Entering, she found the little girl busy arranging her drawers—or rather, re-arranging her clothes, so that several drawers were left vacant. She asked what she was doing.

“Mama, I am making room for Pauline. I have already arranged the doll's cupboard beautifully.”

“But I do not yet know if Pauline can sleep here—this room is so small.”

“Oh, mama, Gustave slept here when he was little, you know. You have but to get his bed out of the hay-loft ; and his curtains are in the linen-

press still, I know. You told me Pauline was to be my little sister, so she ought to sleep beside me."

"I never said she was to be your sister, my child."

"But papa did; and you wish it, do you not, mama?"

"Yes, yes, my darling," said Madame Bessard, with a fond embrace.

Next day, while her mother was away at the farm, Lucie persuaded Denis to get out the little iron bedstead; and when Madame Bessard returned, the room was all ready for her orphan niece. Lucie dared not speak much of Pauline to her mother; but she made up for it by talking of her incessantly to the boys. Paul maintained strongly his resolution to have only one sister. Gustave, on the contrary, was quite ready to treat Pauline exactly like Lucie, alleging only that she could not be considered an orphan, as she had their papa and mama for her own.

"Tell her so; and I'll bet anything she'll begin to cry," said Paul. "That is why I say she shall never be my sister."

"But Paul," argued Lucie, "since uncle and aunt are in heaven, they cannot take care of their little daughter, of course, so they have given her to mama to take care of for them. And if we go to heaven before mama, I dare say they will take care of us for her."

"I don't want to go to heaven without papa and mama," replied Paul, which put an end to the discussion.

Two days after, at eight o'clock in the evening, when the children were all playing together in the hall, Madame Bessard, seated in the drawing-room, heard wheels in the distance. Then lanterns were seen, and lastly, a carriage drove up.

"Papa, papa!" cried the children.

M. Bessard did not reply. Paul ran and opened the carriage-door, and his father slowly stepped out, holding in his arms a bundle of shawls, in the midst of which was visible a little pale face, with shut eyes and a quantity of fair hair.

"Here is your second daughter, my wife," said he, and placed Pauline, still fast asleep, in her aunt's arms.

CHAPTER VIII.

TWO TOGETHER.

PAULINE opened her eyes and felt herself in Madame Bessard's arms. If she understood anything at all, it was that she was no longer in the carriage, but on somebody's lap. Perhaps she thought that somebody was her mother. At any rate, she contented herself with uttering a sigh of satisfaction, and fell asleep again.

"I will put her to bed at once," said Madame Bessard, lifting to her husband moistened eyes.

"Yes ; she has great need of rest. Poor child, there was no one she cared for at Paris—they had only been there three weeks. Nevertheless, in quitting the room they had occupied, she cried as if she knew she would never come back again."

Madame Bessard carried Pauline away, Lucie following. Gustave, half asleep, leant his head against his father's knees. Paul, on the contrary, with eyes wide open, listened to all that was being said.

"Papa," asked he, at last, "is Pauline very unhappy?"

"Very unhappy I hardly think she is, being, thank God, too young for that; but she has lost in three months both father and mother. Were it not for us she would be quite alone in the world. Do you not understand that she is deeply to be pitied?"

"Yes," answered Paul, reflectively; "she is very pretty, is she not, papa?"

M. Bessard smiled. "So you have seen that already? Yes; she is pretty now, and will be still prettier. She is very like her mother, who was charming."

"And good likewise, was she not, papa?"

"Yes. Your aunt was both lovely and lovable."

Paul was silent a moment. "Well, I did say I

wouldn't love her or have her for my sister ; but now I have seen her, I think I will."

"What, Paul," said his father, "did you mean not to love your poor little cousin?"

"No, papa, not exactly that. I would have liked her well enough ; but the others said she would be our sister, and I did not want that : I thought—I thought—I believe I thought you had quite children enough."

"That is to say, my poor boy, you were jealous ! Paul, Paul, pray that you may be kept from that terrible fault, which will make you so wicked, and everybody about you so miserable. Be content : your mother and I have hearts quite large enough to love any child that He may send us, without lessening any one's share ; and God Himself has sent us poor little Pauline. How could I take her, delicate as she is, and after all her sorrows, straight off to a boarding-school—which was the only thing I could have done if I had not brought her here?"

Paul looked a good deal ashamed. "Oh, no, papa, that would be cruel : she is far better with

mama. Only—only—you and mama always belonged to us.”

“Don’t vex yourself, my child : we shall not belong to you any the less. But even admitting that dear busy mama had not so much time to give to you on account of Pauline, would you grudge it ? Remember, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive,’ and spare with a good grace to your cousin a portion of the love and care which she would have had all to herself if her own mother had lived.”

Paul answered softly, “I will try,” and then Madame Bessard and Lucie entered the room.

The little girl sprang on her father’s knee. “Papa, if you had but seen how pretty she looked in her little bed beside mine. She did not wake up : not even when mama laid her down on her pillow. I thought she was expecting me ; but she does not know I am to sleep near her. To-morrow morning, when she opens her eyes, how she will laugh to see me in my little bed ! And if she does not wake early, I shall not rise neither, mama, I warn you ; for I want to see how she will look

when she first sees me. Was she very amusing on the journey, papa ?”

“ A little timid ; and I fancy she was frightened at me. Besides, she was often looking out of the window : the road between Paris and Vire is so very different from Algeria.”

“ That is true,” said Paul. “ What a deal of the world she has seen already ! Gustave, you must get her to tell you all about the Arabs. Now, wake up, and papa will relate the travels of cousin Pauline.”

“ At present, children,” said their mother, “ you will be so kind as to travel off to your beds. Lucie, I will undress you in my room, so as not to wake Pauline.”

Lucie jumped with delight. “ Oh, yes ; and to-morrow night there will be two to be undressed together ! What fun that will be ! ”

The mother sighed. She remembered the time when there were two other children—herself and her sister—bound together during infancy and youth by an intimate affection, such as only can exist between sisters. It had been thus, to the

fullest extent, before their marriage, and neither time nor distance had weakened the tie on either side. Madame Bessard felt that it would be long before she could recover from this heavy loss ; but in the meantime her chief earthly consolation was the little girl that her sister had left her.

Pauline slept quietly. Lucie crept noiselessly to bed ; and in spite of her desire to watch her cousin, scarcely had she said her prayers, and therein added to the names of her brothers, her "little new sister," than she slept as soundly as Pauline. Madame Bessard leaned over to kiss the two children : Pauline stirred and muttered, "Is it you, mama ?" then fell fast asleep again.

Then Madame Bessard went downstairs to talk with her husband, and hear from him all particulars of the death of Madame de Léonsac, and what arrangements he had made concerning Pauline, whose guardian he was, her father having had no near relations.

"She is altogether ours," said he to his wife. "She will be no richer than our own children, though like them, she will have a little, so as not to

lessen their share of our property. By-the-bye, we must look after Paul a little : he is jealous lest his cousin should rob him of our love."

" Oh, that is nothing new. When Gustave was born, though Paul was only three, if you remember, he could not bear to see me with baby on my lap. And when Lucie came, it was the same thing over again. But never mind, Paul is too good a boy for his jealousy to last long."

" And Lucie—what of her ?"

" Lucie never thinks of herself. She is quite engrossed in the idea of taking care of Pauline and making her happy. She may get cross, poor Lucie ! give slaps or say sharp words ; but the thought of jealousy never enters her mind. All she wants is to domineer a little."

" Well, so far, so good, as it is with her that Pauline will be, principally. But how shall you manage about lessons ?"

" I shall teach four children instead of three, that is all ;—easy enough : since Pauline and Lucie are nearly the same age."

" Nevertheless, they are very different in cha-

racter. You will see, my wife, your niece will turn out infinitely more reserved and thoughtful than your daughter. But come, show me these two young ladies in their bed."

The father and mother glanced at Pauline and Lucie, fast asleep: then passed on to the boys' room. Paul was deep in a tranquil slumber, having forgotten alike his jealousy and his good resolutions: Gustave had already thrown off his coverlet, buried his head under his bolster, and kicked his pillow on to the floor. His mother repaired the mischief and disorder; and then went back to her room to pray for all her children, absent as well as present.

Next morning, at seven o'clock, Lucie opened her eyes. Pauline, tired with travelling, slept still. Lucie rose softly, fetched her doll, and then went to bed again with it in her arms, watching her cousin from time to time. But the flaxen wig of Mademoiselle Laurette was much tangled, and it was necessary to put it in special order before introducing the doll to cousin Pauline. So during one long minute Lucie never turned her head, and

when she did, it was to meet two bright eyes, wide open, watching her. She coloured : then, springing out of her bed, went to Pauline's.

" Good morning, little sister, how are you ? Not very tired ? "

Pauline answered softly, " No ; but you are Lucie, are you not ? "

" To be sure I am. And now, shall we get up and say good morning to mama ? "

At the word " mama," Pauline, who had already begun to put on her stockings, turned her head away ; and Lucie saw that her eyes were full of tears.

" Don't cry—please don't," she whispered. " My mama shall be yours, too : aunt gave you to her. And, you know, your mama is in heaven, and we shall go to her there, if we love our Lord Jesus Christ. She is so happy with Him."

But still Pauline sobbed out, " Mama, mama."

Lucie was in despair. She sat down beside Pauline on the bed, and began to cry also, which consoled the orphan better than any reasonings.

The two little girls, helping one another, managed

to dress themselves. Lucie wore her hair short like a boy, so that in spite of the difficulty of the parting in front, she contrived to make it neat ; but Pauline's thick natural curls, which nothing would straighten out, and which had to be combed with endless pains, defeated the efforts of both children.

"We must give it up, and ask mama to do it," said Lucie at last.

"But shall we not say our prayers first?"

"I always say mine with mama, and then she reads me two verses out of the New Testament. Come now."

Pauline let herself be dragged away ; and they went to Madame Bessard's room;—who had been very curious as to what they were doing, but had determined to leave them to themselves, thinking they would make acquaintance more easily.

They both ran and kissed her. Then Lucie said, "Oh, mama, please do comb Pauline's hair ; we can't manage her curls—they are not half so easy as my wig"—and she laughed and shook her close-cropped little brown head.

"Nevertheless, you have made your parting look very much like a ladder."

"Indeed, mama, I thought it was beautiful. And how could I carry a ladder on my head? Would it not be very heavy, Pauline?"

Pauline did not reply. Gravely and sadly she allowed her aunt to arrange her hair, looking at her with eyes that seemed to say, "I like the touch of your hands—they are very kind—but where, oh, where, is mama?" Chatterbox Lucie caught one of these looks, which had the extraordinary effect of making her quite silent.

The two little girls said their prayers together, and then descended to the dining-room, to find Paul and Gustave, and eat their "*soupe*."*

Pauline was regarded with great curiosity by the boys, and their "Good-morning," though affectionate, was a little awkward and embarrassed. Their cousin was not a bit like their sister, being

* French children have their "*soupe*"—which means bread and milk, gruel, milk and water—or any food of that sort, about 8 A.M. The French breakfast, or "*déjeuner*," is usually not until 11 A.M., and is equivalent to our English lunch.

much smaller, much less robust, with tiny hands and feet, a delicate skin, and movements full of grace. Though she was exceedingly shy, Paul thought her prettier even than the night before.

Madame Bessard had given the children a half holiday, that they might take Pauline into the garden. There were no flowers; the winter had been so severe that even the crocuses had scarcely begun to lift up their heads; but the willow-buds, and the first yellow catkins of the nut-trees were perfect novelties to Pauline. Lucie made a wreath of them for her, and took her to Madame Bessard to show how pretty she looked in it. Pauline, accustomed to be quite without playfellows, allowed herself to be led about in a sort of grateful silence; nevertheless, she seemed rather glad than not when her aunt told Lucie to go and play with the boys, and leave cousin Pauline to rest.

It seemed as if already the poor orphan felt, without comprehending it clearly, that she had once more found that constant tenderness and care which mothers only can give. Seating herself on a cushion at Madame Bessard's feet, she leaned her

head against her without speaking. Her aunt likewise said nothing. But both of them were quite content.

“Aunt,” asked Pauline, at last, “do you think my mama sees us?”

“I cannot tell, my child ; but I am sure that she loves us up in heaven as she did here.”

And stooping over Pauline, she kissed her softly. The child hung about her neck, and understood vaguely that her aunt’s grief was even heavier than her own.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DOLLS.

LUCIE had won her "discretion." Though the late events in the family, Madame de Léonsac's death and Pauline's arrival, had distracted attention from this important subject, the little girl herself had by no means forgotten it. She was too proud of having passed a whole month without flying into a passion, and even without scolding, to neglect to claim her recompense. True, since the month's end, she had been as bad as ever; but then she accounted for it by saying, that to be good for a month, after being naughty for six years, was the utmost that could be expected of her; and that no one could lose all at once the habit of getting angry.

"All the stronger reason for trying hard to do so," said the mother ; "each day that you do not fight against ill habits confirms them the more."

"But, mama, it is so difficult to be always trying to be good."

"Undoubtedly, my daughter ; but, nevertheless, we must keep on trying to the end of our days."

"Mama, do you never go into a rage ?"

"I used to do it. When I was a child I was more passionate even than you ; but, thank God, I have got over it, so you see this is possible."

"I think, mama," Lucie said again, "if you would give me a 'discretion' for each of my faults, one after the other, I might correct them, and then I should be perfect, and have no more need to try at all."

"So, after having passed a month without scolding, you are quite cured of that fault, I suppose ?"

Lucie blushed. "Don't tease me, mama ; you know well that I have been very angry more than once since February began, and I am very sorry for it too," continued she, hiding her face on her mother's lap.

"Listen, my child," said the mother, gravely. "There is but one way of growing good—fighting resolutely against our faults, and asking God to help us. He always helps those who do ask Him, provided they ask Him with all their hearts."

Lucie answered very softly, "I'll do that, mama. I ought to be good, for I shall soon be seven years old."

"Very true, I had forgotten your mature years. But tell me—what will you have for your 'discretion?' Your birthday present I have already decided on."

"Oh, mama, dearest mama, might I have a lot of paper and wafer seals? Pauline has such a pretty paper-case. I saw it in her trunk. It contains paper of all sorts of colours, pens, a seal, sealing-wax, envelopes, transparent seal wafers, an ink-stand, and a pounce-box. You never saw anything so pretty. And she has a P. on the seal. May I have one like it? it is not too dear, I know, for Pauline told me it only cost ten francs. If I could only have some paper on which to write to Charles and Edouard!"

"We shall see. What have you done with Pauline this morning?"

"Paul has taken her with him to the fields. It is very funny; you know he said at first he would not have her for a sister, and now he is so fond of her he never quits her."

Madame Bessard smiled. "Go and meet them now; bring Pauline back, and say I want both of you to help me to unpack the trunks that have come by the wagon."

As soon as Lucie was gone, her mother opened her treasure closet, and took thence a charming little mahogany desk, rather ancient in shape, perhaps, but in very good condition. She filled it with paper, envelopes, wafers—keeping back, however, two quires of note-paper. Then, seating herself at the table, she opened a colour-box, seldom touched, and began to trace, with light and skilful hand, on the top of each sheet the letters L. and B., entwined in a monogram. When this was done, she placed the ornamental paper in company with the rest, closed the desk, and put it back in her closet. The same moment the two little girls ran into her

room. Pauline looked quite another person, her eyes so bright, her cheeks so red, and her beautiful curls all in disorder.

"Where are my trunks, aunt?" cried she, as she came in.

"In the linen-closet. How could I put into your tiny room two big boxes? Indeed, where I shall stow them away when they are empty I have no idea."

"May we sleep in them, aunt?" said Pauline, laughing.

"That will do beautifully," added Lucie, "and then every morning we can shut them, and sit down on the top of them."

"Unless some fine day you are lost, and found long afterwards, like Ginevra, whose story I once told you, with the lid of the boxes shut down upon you—smothered and dead."

"That must have been because Ginevra had no mama; I am certain my mama would have found me," said Lucie, energetically. "And now, do let us go and open the trunks."

They all went to the linen-closet. From the

moment it was known these boxes were on their way to La Vacherie, Pauline had never ceased to talk to Lucie about the dolls they contained ; so much so, that to hear her speak, one would have thought the little girl's wardrobe consisted entirely, not of frocks or petticoats, but only dolls. Lucie had half come to believe that in Algeria playthings were found at every step—one had but to stoop and pick them up. The fact was that Pauline, only child of a colonel of cavalry, was the pet of all the officers of the regiment, and since the idea of a doll is the first that offers itself to the mind of a gentleman who wishes to make a present to a little girl, Pauline's family of dolls was very numerous ; the more so, as she never broke or destroyed any of them, having been obliged to learn to play quietly with them, during her father's illness, which lasted more than a year. For M. de Léonsac had continued in the army as long as he could sit on horseback ; but when he was at home he was usually so ill as to need absolute rest, which was not difficult to get with a delicate wife and a sweet - tempered daughter. It was an

astonishment often to Madame Bessard to see how, in spite of her own extreme quietness, Pauline soon got used to the noise of her cousins, and how, while still keeping her gentle reserved manner, she took part in their fun, and amused herself with their gaiety.

The first trunk was opened, but the little girls were not allowed to search for dolls. Madame Bessard took from it piles of under-clothes, dresses, and mantles, and commissioned her little hand-maids to carry these direct to their room. It was after half-an-hour of this uninteresting exercise that Lucie, leaning over the box, saw a bit of rose-coloured silk sticking out.

"Have you got a frock of pink silk?" asked she of her cousin, in great awe.

"No; it belongs to Amélie, my French daughter."

"Have you, then, dolls of all countries?"

"Of a good many. Aunt, may I take out Amélie?"

"Stop a minute, and I will unpack her, my dear. There she is; very pretty, and quite unhurt."

"But, aunt, she is not one of my favourite chil-

dren. I like my little Arab better. She is most likely in the other trunk."

Lucie scarcely left her mother time to turn the key, so impatient was she to see the Arab doll that Pauline spoke of. Whosoever had packed the boxes had evidently no respect for dolls, for they were all at the very bottom of the box—some of them being stowed away under the books. At last there came to view a doll, dressed in a yellow silk vest, embroidered with silver, a tunic of red silk, pantaloons of white silk, and a long veil of silver gauze. Her black curls were adorned with little pieces of silver money, and she had a necklace and bracelets also of coins, imitating gold.

"Oh, mama, what a beautiful doll!" cried Lucie, rapturously.

"Isn't she pretty?" said Pauline. "And I love her best of all, because it was my mama who dressed her. But I have a little Jewess, who is nearly as pretty."

The Jewess was discovered; and Lucie divided her admiration between the two young orientals. Then there were unpacked three ladies—a Swiss,

an Italian, and a Spaniard, and a quantity of babies. They counted ten dolls in very fair condition, and many others only slightly damaged. Lucie examined them over and over again, and planned how they were to be mended, their clothes ironed, and so on. She was not jealous ; but doubtless she would not have been sorry had a share of all these riches belonged to herself.

Pauline whispered in her aunt's ear, " May I divide my dolls with Lucie ? "

" If you wish it, my child ; but suppose you were to give her one ?—it would be sufficient."

" Oh, no, Aunt. Lucie gives me half of all her playthings. Now, Lucie, choose for yourself among my dolls. You may take any you please, except the little Arab, because my mama gave her to me. There are ten nice dolls. We shall have five apiece, and we'll throw the old ones away."

" Nobody ever throws anything away here," said Madame Bessard. " Lucie will show you how we mend them, and make them do for the poor little children in the village. Lucie, child, don't look so

stupified—choose among the dolls that Pauline wishes to divide with you.”

Lucie threw herself on her cousin's neck.—“Oh, how good you are—how I love you—but I won't take half of your children. Give me just one—any one you choose.”

“But Lucie,” said Pauline, “how can I take care of ten children? Often for a whole month some of them are never undressed, and that fatigues them very much, you know. Since you will not choose for yourself, suppose you take the little Jewess, the Italian, the French lady, and two babies: the smallest baby shall be the child of the French woman. And then I can keep the Arab, the Swiss, the Spaniard, and two other babies. Look! this baby opens and shuts its eyes. Will you have it?”

The two little girls had quite forgotten all about the unpacking of the trunk and arranging of the clothes on the shelves. They sat on the floor, pulling out the crumpled dresses of the dolls, examining their faces, feet, hands, and clothes. Pauline, for once more talkative than Lucie, told

the history of all her daughters, and passed in review for her cousin's edification all the officers of the regiment who had given them to her.

This interesting occupation was stopped by Madame Bessard, who reminded them that, if they wished the dolls to live in their room, they must finish the arrangements for their accommodation. So, with a slight sigh, the dolls were laid aside, and the little girls fell heartily to work. Soon, their night-gowns, stockings, pocket-handkerchiefs, and the rest of their clothes, were arranged with so much art, that they contrived to find room for the linen of both little girls in the same space which one had formerly occupied ; and still there was left a tiny cupboard, which might serve for a doll's house. Of furniture for this, Lucie had a bed and a chest of drawers ; Pauline, a second bed, a table, a sofa, two chairs, and a glass wardrobe, but this latter, being too big to enter the cupboard, was obliged to be placed outside, like a soldier on guard.

The little cousins had only just completed their arrangements when the first bell rang for dinner.

They dressed very quickly, and descended the stairs, four steps at a time. In the drawing-room they found M. Bessard, who sat reading his newspaper beside the little desk which has already been mentioned, and which had been secretly placed on the table.

"Oh, what a pretty box!" said Pauline. "It was not here this morning, was it, uncle?"

"No. Open it, Lucie."

Lucie, not a little surprised, obeyed; but at the first glance inside, she turned crimson, hardly daring to believe in what it all meant.

"Look at that ornamental paper," said her father. And when she saw the L. and B., poor little Lucie fairly cried with pleasure, and hid her face on her father's arm.

"Is it for me—all for me?"

"Yes, my pet; it is your 'discretion.' Your mother found this pretty little desk in her drawers, and she filled it with paper, as you wished, and, over and above the bargain, she has drawn this elegant monogram for you."

"Oh, I am too happy—only too happy to-day!"

cried Lucie, quite overcome. "All these beautiful dolls, and a desk besides! For, papa, you don't know that Pauline has given me half of her daughters. There is a Jewess, and an Italian, a French woman, and two babies; and we have arranged them all in their room in the cupboard. You must come and look how pretty it all is."

"What—Pauline has given you half her daughters! What a bad mother! I am sure mama would never give anybody half of her children."

Pauline crept close to her uncle, with her delicate, sad little face.

"Uncle, my mama gave you her little girl: it is true, she could not take care of me herself any longer."

M. Bessard stooped and kissed the child, as tenderly as if she had been one of his own.

CHAPTER X.

THE ANEMONES.

ON the first of March, very early in the morning, Paul departed on a distant expedition. For two days back he had held mysterious conversations with Pauline, and, the evening before, he had asked his father's permission to go out the first thing after he rose, as there would be no lessons on account of Lucie's birthday.

Lucie woke sooner than ordinary, probably because she felt she was now growing too old to sleep much, and also that she heard a knock at the door of her brother's room. Lucie was a rather curious little girl, so she half opened her own door to see what was happening, and there perceived her brother Paul, with a little packet in

his hand. Over his arm hung his waterproof paletot, meant for rainy days, when he went to take mathematical lessons from their neighbour, M. Darbois. But it did not rain to-day, so why had Paul taken his waterproof? and above all, what was he doing with the basket?

Lucie could not explain to herself this momentous question, so she went back to bed again until Pauline should wake, or until her mother should come into their room. She lay till seven, when she heard a door close, a drawer open, and other sounds, which implied that Madame Bessard was dressing. Then, slipping out at the foot of her bed, she ran in to the next room, her heart full of good resolutions for the future.

Mother and daughter embraced. "God bless thee, my child!" said one; and "Oh, I will be so very, very good!" answered the other.

Then, quitting her mother's arms, Lucie stood dumb with admiration. For on the table was a charming little brown hat, trimmed with black velvet.

"Is it for me, mama? oh, is it for me?"

"Yes, my darling. Don't you remember the straw?"

"The straw which you plaited yourself?"

"I plaited it, sewed it together, and then trimmed it. Now let us see the result of such hard labours."

Lucie put the hat on the top of her rough hair, to which she had not given a single touch of the brush, so eager was she to see her mother.

"Let me arrange it a little. Yes, child, it is quite becoming. I find I have a new talent. I can now make all your summer hats myself; and when my eyes are tired with sewing, I can rest them by plaiting straw."

"Mama, I do believe that you can make anything in the world, except shoes. And last year, you know you actually made gaiters for Charles and Edouard."

"But that was in cloth; I have no vocation for the trade of shoemaker. Now, go and dress; or else go to bed again till Pauline wakes."

"No: I had rather dress, mama. I could not possibly keep quiet in bed."

So saying, Lucie ran back again, filled her wash-

hand basin, and was amusing herself with dipping the end of her nose into the cold water, when two little arms seized her from behind. It was Pauline, wishing "happy returns" to her cousin, and holding tight in her hand a little packet.

"Thank you, thank you!" cried Lucie; "only don't quite strangle me. And what have you got in your hand?"

"My present for you. Shut your eyes, and open them when I say, 'All right!'"

Lucie wished extremely to keep her eyes a very little way open; but she remembered that would not be quite honourable, and she had promised her mother to be perfectly good for the future, so she shut her eyes as tight as possible. Then she felt Pauline pass something round and round her neck; and though she was longing to see, or feel, she kept her hands safe out of the way. Pauline would not come to an end: moreover, she began tickling Lucie, who grew rather impatient.

"All right!" cried Pauline at last.

Lucie opened her eyes, but saw nothing; how-

ever, round her neck she felt a black velvet ribbon and a locket. Running to the glass, she discovered that it was a lovely little locket, which Pauline kept in the box which she pompously called her jewel-case, as it contained a bracelet of sequins, a brooch, a coral necklace, and two sleeve-buttons.

"Who gave you that beautiful locket? Has it hair inside?" asked Lucie.

"Cousin Léon gave it me, and it has inside my hair and mama's—I mean mama's and mine; and it is your locket now, Lucie. I give it you."

"Oh! I will wear it every evening when I dress for dinner."

"There may be something else coming," continued Pauline; "but I don't know. It all depends upon Paul."

"Paul! don't reckon on him, for I know he went out quite early this morning."

"Of course he did! We are going to make ourselves beautiful for your birthday."

"But that will not be till dinner-time. Now let us go downstairs. We are to have chocolate to-day, and we may toast our bread ourselves."

So chattering, the little girls ran downstairs to the dining-room. Gustave followed them, and almost smothered his sister with kisses. Then he began fumbling in his pockets, and drew out thence a ball of twine.

"No : that isn't it," said he, and took out successively a ball, a whip-lash, two pocket handkerchiefs, three marbles, a whistle, and finally, a little knife, which he handed in triumph to Lucie. "Mama said I might give it to you. I bought it the last time I went with papa to Vire, and directly afterwards I thought I would keep it for your birthday present, because it had a round point to the blade, and mama said you might have it."

"Oh, how pleasant ! how kind you are, Gustave ! And I never had a knife before ! Now, even if mama will not give me a knife at dinner, I shall take this one out of my pocket, and cut my meat myself."

"If aunt allows it," gravely said Pauline.

"Oh ! I am sure she will allow it. Here is our chocolate. Thank you, Annette. Now, who will toast the bread ?"

"I will," answered Pauline. "I am very clever at it, for I used always to toast my mama's bread for her breakfast."

The fire had been lit, but was not very warm yet; and Pauline, her toasting-fork in her hand, approached nearer and nearer the opening of the stove. Suddenly the wind in the chimney carried the flame outwards, and a spark from one of the burning logs fell on the child's pinafore, which was aflame in a second.

"Mama, mama!" she piteously cried, forgetting that her mother could help her no more.

Lucie, who had been sitting at the other side of the table, darted to her cousin, but Gustave was there before her. He seized the table-cover,—of tapestry-work, which, during meal times, was laid aside on a chair,—and rolling Pauline up in it, pressed her tightly against him. The flames were extinguished before Annette, who was too well used to hear the children making a noise, had thought of disturbing herself from her potato-peeling. Then, surprised by their silence more than by their outcries, and half opening the kitchen

door, she stood petrified with horror at perceiving Pauline, with her clothes half burnt, laid on the floor by Gustave, while Lucie kneeling beside her, was giving her a glass of water.

"Oh! what has happened?" cried the affectionate cook.

"Hold your tongue, Annette; she will be better soon," said Gustave. "But we have been so frightened. Look at her pinafore."

"Her pinafore caught fire, and but for Gustave she would have been burnt to death. He rolled her up in the table-cover. Don't scream, Annette; we don't want mama to be told."

"Oh yes; we must tell her," said Pauline, faintly. "First, because I can't bear secrets, and then I want her to kiss Gustave and praise him."

"Never mind that, Pauline, because mama might scold you for going too near the fire."

"If she does, still I want her to know," persisted Pauline.

"But it might do her harm," suggested Lucie. "And since you are not hurt, why trouble her? I know better than you how to manage mama;

let me do it all. Don't you meddle, or say anything."

While in the height of dispute, the three children went out to the hall and there met Paul, who, all wet with morning dews, entered the dining-room, basket in hand. He exchanged a signal of intelligence with Pauline and disappeared, returning shortly without his basket.

"Good morning, Lucie," said he. "Many happy returns of your birthday. And here is a penholder, which I have bought out of the sous I got for my good marks ; it will quite fit into your desk. But what is the matter ? you all seem so queer."

"Look at Pauline's pinafore."

"Oh ! why did you let her catch fire ? And how was it put out ?"

"Gustave rolled me up in the table-cover," cried Pauline eagerly ; upon which Paul hugged his brother so vehemently that Gustave cried out.

"And where were you all going when I met you ?" Paul inquired.

Pauline answered that it was to tell her aunt ;

but that Lucie objected, saying it would frighten her mama and do her harm.

"It will do her more harm to fancy we could keep anything back from her. So, give me your hand, Pauline, and we'll all go together."

Lucie yielded her place in silence, and the four children were going upstairs, when they met Madame Bessard coming down. At once she saw what had happened, and without asking any questions took Pauline in her arms, and sat down on the last step of the stairs, kissing and caressing her, and examining carefully her face, hands, and arms, to be certain that she was not the least burnt. The children, astonished at her quietness, watched her silently. At last Pauline said,—

"You see, aunt, I am not the least hurt, thanks to Gustave, who put out the fire at once."

"How did he do it?"

Lucie began telling the whole story, Gustave blushing and fidgeting the while, as if he had done something wrong. Madame Bessard looked at Paul, and to her great joy she saw in his face not a shadow of jealousy.

"You had not come in, Paul?" she said.

"No, mama; and if anything had happened to Pauline, I should never have forgiven myself for not being there."

"See, children," said the mother, earnestly, "what a lesson we have had. Let us never forget this birthday, to which we had looked forward so much, and which was near being darkened by such a terrible misfortune. Let us thank God for His mercies with all our hearts, and be more watchful in future. And Pauline, remember to take care of yourself doubly, both for your mama's sake and mine."

"Yes, aunt," said Pauline, and went to put on another pinafore; but she remained pale all day, and at night she woke Lucie with screaming, "Help! help!" However, nobody took much notice of this, except Madame Bessard, who understood how delicate her new daughter was, and how much she needed the constant care which she had been accustomed to from infancy. Nevertheless, the companionship of her cousins, who had not a notion of danger or fatigue, was very good for

her, even though they made her a little nervous sometimes. Gradually she gained more courage, and began every day to do things which three months before she would have believed impossible.

Breakfast over, the grand question was how to manage to gather, without Lucie's knowing, some violets which grew in a sheltered corner of the garden. Two days ago, Paul had found a few anemones in the wood, but had communicated his discovery to no one except Pauline. This morning he had been after them, and had brought home a superb nosegay. And those who live in the country can understand the delight of gathering the first nosegay of wood anemones.

Meantime, Pauline crept in from the garden, her pinafore filled with violets, and went into the pantry where Paul was arranging his anemones in a grand bunch. These were surrounded with a triple row of violets, then again with a circle of ivy-leaves, and finally, the bouquet was placed in a little vase which Charles and Edouard had sent from Paris a week beforehand, and which had lain

all that time concealed in Madame Bessard's closet, waiting for the 1st of March.

The two cousins having finished their arrangements, they washed their hands, and left their bouquet in charge of Annette, whom the next instant Lucie met in the dining-room.

"Annette," said she, "I want a glass; may I fetch it out of the pantry?"

Faithful Annette made but one bound to the pantry door. "No, mademoiselle, nobody can go in there."

"Not go into the pantry! Why not? Mama sent me for a glass. What is the matter? I will go in!"

"‘I will,’ indeed! or, as the king says, ‘We will.’ All very grand, mademoiselle; but the king himself couldn't go into the pantry, just now. Take a glass from the table; I shall not open the pantry door as long as you stay here."

Lucie, surprised and a little indignant, went back to her mother's room, which she found empty, and immediately the bell rang for prayers in M. Bessard's study. Her father's tender voice, as he

prayed God to bless one of his little girls on her birthday,* and thanked Him for having preserved the other from a horrible death, made Lucie forget, for the time, the mystery about the pantry. But as soon as she got back into the dining-room she guessed it all. For beside her plate was the lovely nosegay of anemones placed in a crystal vase, which she had never seen before.

"Oh! oh!" she cried, choking with pleasure. "And I did not know there were any anemones yet."

"This is your nosegay, from cousin Pauline," said Paul.

"But cousin Paul got them, and was soaked through in doing it," added Pauline.

"And the vase is a present from Charles and Edouard to Lucie," explained Madame Bessard. "And now, my children, come to table, or Marie's galette † will be all burnt."

* It should be explained that the Bessards were French Protestants, who use extempore family prayer—like our English and Scotch Presbyterians.

† Galette is a sort of buttered cake, very popular with French children.

"Galette! are we to have galette? What happiness!" cried all the children.

"And this morning, thanks to my stupidity, we did not even get our toasted bread," said Pauline.

"Oh, never mind that," said Lucie. "It was lucky we did not get a toasted sister."

"I think, after all," said M. Bessard, "it is mama's table-cover which has suffered the most from that little adventure."

"And Pauline's pinafore, papa," observed Gustave.

Madame Bessard begged them not to speak about the matter any more, unless it was to thank God that nothing worse had happened. And the children, seeing how pale their mother grew in even thinking of the danger that Pauline had run, began to talk about Paul, his anemones, and his expedition into the wood this morning.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE KITCHEN.

TWO years had gone by, and the little people at the Grange had grown—certainly much bigger, it is to be hoped much wiser—when one morning at breakfast, Gustave cried out, with a grimace of exceeding disgust,—

“Mama, the omelette is burnt.”

“Very possibly, my boy: I thought so when I was helping your father.”

“But,” observed Lucie, “papa has eaten it, nevertheless.”

“And, moreover,” said M. Bessard, “papa expects that you will do the same. How should you like being three months without the sight of an egg? Such a misfortune has happened to me before now.”

"Oh," said Pauline, "it would not matter to me : I don't care for eggs."

"But what would you have done, you children who cannot touch a burnt omelette, if you had been shut up in Leyden when the Spaniards besieged the town in the time of Philip the Second. Everything was eaten, dogs, cats, rats, mice, the grass in the streets, the leather of the horses' harness—and still nobody thought of giving up the town."

Said Pauline, with her eyes glittering, "But the people were delivered, uncle?"

"Yes. In that queer country, Holland, the sea is kept out by means of dykes, enormous earthen walls ; the people of Leyden broke through these walls, and so caused the sea to pour in, inundating everything. The Spaniards had to run away ; and then came the Prince of Orange, William the Silent, with his ships, to the rescue of the town."

"The Prince of Orange ! what a funny name ! Why was he called so, papa ?" asked Lucie.

"Because he inherited the principality of Orange in the south of France."

"Oh," burst out Gustave, overcome by his wrongs, and indifferent to the Prince of Orange, "Marie is so stupid ! I am sure I could make an omelette without burning it."

"I too," said Lucie, "I am sure I could cook a very good dinner."

"You would both be a little puzzled," smiled the mother.

Paul did not think so : he believed they could manage very well ; and Pauline asserted strongly her capacity for picking peas and other vegetables : Gustave entreated that some day they might be allowed to cook a dinner all by themselves.

"In that case, my dear," said M. Bessard, "may I make one condition ? If you resign your kitchen to these young cooks, will you leave me some cold meat, or else I will beg a dinner of friend Darbois : I don't wish to die of hunger."

"I thought you could eat anything, uncle ?" laughed Pauline.

"Yes ; anything in reason. After all, if your aunt will faithfully promise me a slice of cold meat in reserve, I will risk your dinner."

The children all begged for this favour ; and at last the mother, wishing to make them trust less in their own capacities, and more in the cook's, granted it. "I agree," said she : "Gustave may cease to pull faces over a bit of burnt omelette when he sees how difficult it is to make one. You shall try."

"And what day—what day, mama?"

"Let it be Thursday," said M. Bessard, "and I shall try to breakfast heartily, and exert myself very little, lest I should die of starvation before night."

"Well, uncle, if you came to dinner very hungry, you would gobble up our good things without tasting them. However, you can walk six leagues that day, to get an appetite."

"Yes," said Paul. "Three leagues on horseback, and three on foot."

"Thank you ; but unluckily the farm is not big enough for that ; and I have nothing else to do."

"Mama," asked Lucie, anxiously, "may we get anything we want from the cook ? And we shall want very nice things, because our dinner must be excellent."

"You shall have meat, vegetables, eggs, and materials for making a sweet dish of some sort. Only when once you have made up your minds, you cannot change them again, or get anything else."

"And the soup, aunt?"

"You had better give us broth; which is almost sure to be unsuccessful, because you ought to have made it yourselves, overnight."

Lucie here proposed that the meat should be left to the boys to manage, as it would not be pleasant to touch.

"A nice cook!" exclaimed M. Bessard. "I wonder what would become of us all if Marie declined to touch the meat!"

"But, papa, ladies never touch those sort of things."

"You mistake, my little girl. In America, ladies quite as well educated as you are likely to be, work for their husbands and children, and are ladies still. And, more than once, when we were in Algeria, your mother, with the help of my orderly, has cooked our dinners; and I have eaten worse, I can assure you."

"That is not saying much ; for you must have eaten some very bad ones," replied Madame Bes-sard, smiling. "But now, young ladies and gentlemen, consult together on your bill of fare—anything you like : only let me know it by Wednesday morning, before I send to market."

After long and sometimes very stormy discussions, the children settled upon mutton cutlets, potatoes, eggs, and cream.

"Well chosen," observed the mother. "I can hardly imagine an easier dinner to cook. You are more prudent than I expected. The eggs alone disturb my mind a little—what are you going to do with them?"

"We are going to make an omelette ; and it shall *not* be burnt !"

"No ; half-cooked, perhaps. We shall see. At what hour do you require your provisions ?"

"Quite early, mama," entreated Lucie, "because it will be all so very amusing."

"We couldn't put our cutlets on the gridiron at eight o'clock in the morning," said Paul, contemptuously : "they would be overdone."

"Rather. Then by noon you shall have the kitchen left free, with all your materials ready: this will allow you plenty of time to exert yourselves."

On Thursday morning, Lucie and Pauline entered Madame Bessard's room, attired in wrapping-gowns.

"What is all this for?" asked the mother.

"Oh, we don't want to dirty our frocks with cooking."

"But you are not going to begin cooking immediately. Marie does not usually come to receive my orders in her petticoat; and, besides, I suppose you will do papa and me the honour of breakfasting with us?"

The two little girls ran away to change their costume, much amused at the notion of cooks and scullion-boys sitting down previously to breakfast with Monsieur and Madame; but as soon as breakfast was over, they ran back again to their room, in order to dress themselves after their fancy. They had taken off their frocks, and were putting on huge pinafores of grey calico, when

Madame Bessard appeared. Pauline, with all her curls gathered up, was vainly trying to fasten them at the back of her neck by means of a hair-pin.

"Put on your night-caps, children," suggested her aunt.

Enchanted with this idea, the little girls adopted it; and then ran to find the boys, who laughed exceedingly at the figures they cut. Paul and Gustave had contented themselves with taking off their jackets. They stood in their shirt-sleeves, contemplating the provisions with a pensive air.

"Marie has one good notion, anyhow," said Gustave. "She has divided the cutlets for us."

"She was obliged to do it, as I heard aunt tell her not to leave us the chopper. Now, how did we settle things? Read the bill of fare."

"Bread-soup, cutlets fried with bread-crumbs, an omelette, roasted potatoes, and whipped cream. Behold a dinner fit for an emperor!"

"Yes—if it were cooked."

"We'll cook it—no fear! In the first place, let me break my eggs."

"But," interposed Paul, "you are not going to make the omelette just at present."

"Still, I wish to break my eggs: they are not like eau-de-Cologne, they won't evaporate."

So saying, Gustave seized his first egg, and struck it against the edge of the saucepan; but instead of letting the yelk and the white drop softly on the dish, he gave it such a severe blow that the shell burst altogether, and its contents were spattered all over his legs, and even ran into his shoes.

"Oh, dear!" said he, looking down with an air of consternation.

"That is the beginning of trouble," cried Pauline, "I know the cutlets will be burnt, the potatoes raw; and we shall have to cook Gustave himself as an omelette, for want of eggs. However, we shall still get our soup, if we don't upset the pot."

"You bird of ill omen, hold your tongue!" cried Lucie. "I am going to whip the cream—see how capitally I can do it."

She tucked up the sleeves of her pinafore, show-

ing a pair of arms, very white and pretty, but quite unequal to wielding the bundle of osier-rods which was laid beside a salad-bowl filled with cream. After working at it for five minutes, she called Pauline to her assistance.

“ Take your turn—I can do no more.”

Pauline's arms were weaker still. Besides, the cream was already beginning to thicken. Pauline had whipped it but for three minutes, when Paul, seeing her state of utter exhaustion, came to the rescue. At the first stroke of the rods, he sent half the cream flying across the table ; but, warned by this misadventure, though he whipped on, he whipped more gently—this dish at least was saved. When it was perfect, Lucie, very triumphant, carried the salad-bowl into the pantry, out of harm's way.

Gustave meantime contemplated anxiously his second egg, of which half at least had fallen, by rare good luck, into the frying-pan—the rest was flowing along the table.

“ Suppose I were to break them at once into the pan,” said he ; and experience having taught him

thus to preserve the liquid interior of the eggs, he did not disquiet himself about a few large pieces of shell which floated upon its surface.

The afternoon advanced. Much time had already been lost, first in whipping the cream, and then in admiring it. Paul proposed putting the cutlets on the gridiron.

"As you like," answered Lucie; "for me, I shall occupy myself with the potatoes: because, as papa says, I don't fancy raw meat."

"Then you'd better marry a Brahmin—they never eat anything which has had life."

"Oh, I couldn't do that; for I am fond of meat—only it must be first cooked. Paul, you are taking up all the fire with your cutlets; and you won't leave me any room for my potatoes."

Pauline here interrupted, with a solemn air, as if reciting poetry. "The cutlets will be burnt, potatoes raw, on its two legs the omelette will walk—"

"Will you hold your tongue!" cried Lucie. "You make game of us, and do nothing yourself. Can't you get the soup ready, at least?"

"Certainly; for that has the best chance of being good. Well! where is the broth?"

"There—in that earthen pot."

"No; that is only fat and grease."

"Decidedly, Pauline, your strong point is not cooking. Don't you know that the grease swims on the top because it is cold? Take it off gently with a spoon, and then place the pot near the fire to get hot."

Pauline obeyed, but in so doing she managed to spill a good quantity of broth down the neck of her cousin Paul, who was busy arranging his cutlets on the gridiron.

"Oh, Pauline, take care! It feels so nasty and cold!" cried he.

"You may be very thankful it was not hot," said Lucie. "It would have been, half an hour hence. My potatoes are now quite right; and I hope will be ready before long. Paul, Paul, look after your cutlets! They're all blackening."

Paul darted towards the fire—not too soon; for the cutlets gave forth a frightful odour of burnt meat. He turned them hastily. Alas! the finest

of them all, the one upon which all his hopes were built, somehow fell into the ashes : he picked it up, trusting no one had seen the disaster, and replaced it on the gridiron without telling.

Gustave could not understand his omelette at all. The eggs began well enough, then attached themselves firmly to the bottom of the frying-pan, and in spite of the little boy's efforts, absolutely refused to jump. At length, by dint of great shaking of the handle of the pan, a little fountain of egg-yolk darted up from the middle of it, and lighted just on the nose of Gustave, who immediately dropped the frying-pan and began screaming loudly.

Pauline seized one of the potatoes left uncooked, and cut off it a cool slice, which she made into a plaister for Gustave's scalded nose. Soon he declared himself no longer in pain ; but the omelette was completely, hopelessly ruined ; and the humiliated little cook sat himself down in a quiet corner to take care of his poor nose at his ease.

The cutlets, more or less done, arrived safely on their dish : Pauline had put into her broth bread

enough to nourish three starving persons, at least ; and had poured the whole of it into the soup-tureen. Lucie was folding with great pains a table-napkin in which to serve up her baked potatoes ; and Gustave had gone to fetch the cream. Upon this scene Madame Bessard entered. She was nearly bursting into fits of laughter at sight of the kitchen—with all the dishes on the table, all the saucepans on the floor, a lake of egg-yelks in one corner, a pool of broth in another, an ocean of cream in a third. The four cooks were black from head to foot—still they all had a slightly triumphant air—except Gustave, who owned himself beaten. Marie might burn her omelettes—sometimes ; but as for him, he could not even succeed in making one.

“ Go and dress for dinner, children ; and make haste, or it will be cold.”

“ But, mama, it is not customary for cooks to dine at table.”

“ I own that, Lucie. Nevertheless, for this time never mind, only make haste.”

In about a quarter-of-an-hour everybody assem-

bled in the dining-room. Gustave's nose was a little red and swollen ; but nobody noticed it. M. Bessard took off the cover of the soup-tureen, and tried to put the spoon therein ; but it stuck in the centre, and remained immovable.

" Bravo !" cried he, " this seems a nourishing dish : who is the author of it ? "

" I, uncle," proudly said Pauline ; " but I see there is a little too much bread in it."

" Rather ; and so the bread has drunk up all the broth ; but never mind. Thanks to Pauline, we shall at any rate not die of hunger."

Paul had been so frightened by the secret misadventure of his cutlets, that they now appeared at table burnt on one side, and half raw on the other. Most disastrously, his father happened to take the very one which had fallen among the ashes.

" What can this be which I feel crackling between my teeth ? " said M. Bessard.

" Perhaps," said Madame Bessard, " it is a little bit burnt."

" Nevertheless, I find also in my cutlet some strange ingredient. What is it, Paul ? "

Paul, blushing deeply, replied, "It may be a cinder, papa."

"Oh, yes! I thought I recognised something of the sort. Happily there is the cold beef on the sideboard. For, I perceive, the omelette also has fallen into the ashes."

"Except a bit which Gustave has kept for his nose," said Lucie.

"Yes; it is very red, I see. Were you burnt, my poor boy?"

"Not much, papa. Please look at Lucie's potatoes," said Gustave, severely.

The potatoes were eatable, at any rate; and everybody was too hungry to complain of deficiencies. The cream also was saluted with acclamations—only there was so very little of it.

"Marie has been stingy over her cream," said Madame Bessard.

"Oh, no. Paul spilt some of it—half of it, I think," remarked Lucie.

"Well, children," said the father, good-humouredly, "I did not expect to get anything to eat at all, to-day; and I have dined pretty well on

the whole, with the help of that slice of cold beef. Let me pay you my acknowledgments for the feast. Only, without any reflections on the present cooks, don't you think we had better for the future content ourselves with Marie?"

"Yes, yes, papa!" cried all the young folks: Paul adding that as he himself was quite worn out, as Gustave had a burnt nose, and the two girls were—

"The two girls are not in the least tired," interrupted Lucie, "only their heads ache a little. The fire is very hot when one is not accustomed to it. But I am certain that the second dinner we cook will be excellent."

"If it is the same to you, I will confine my experience to the first," said M. Bessard.

"After all," remarked Pauline, "Marie made the broth for us, separated the cutlets, and washed the potatoes. Else we might not have been able to have dinner until nine o'clock at night."

"Or not have dined at all," suggested M. Bessard.

CHAPTER XII.

THE STORM.

IT was the month of June, and M. Bessard passed his whole time in the fields. His wife declared that he worked harder than all his labourers put together. Paul, who fancied himself indispensable to his father, would have followed him all day long, but was unfortunately obliged to leave home daily at six in the morning, in order to go to his tutor, M. Darbois, at whose house he breakfasted, and did not return till four in the afternoon.

Madame Darbois was a little delicate-looking woman, who had nevertheless most robust health. She had accompanied her husband everywhere ; nursed him when he was wounded, and loved him like the other half of herself. She loved Paul

Bessard, too, almost like a son—for her only child had died when a baby, and she had never been comforted for this loss. The boy knew how fond she was of him, and rather took advantage of it. Without being richer than her neighbours, Madame Darbois had fewer mouths to devour her jams and preserves ; and M. Darbois, who did no farming, had not labourers to pay and carts to repair everlastingly. Consequently, Paul ate up all the cherries, and often happened to have a sous or two in his pocket, M. Darbois having established a system of good marks very advantageous to his pupil. Not only did he pay Paul those he earned from himself, but from his father, who was, however, much harder to please. Good marks did not abound at La Vacherie.

This was Paul's last year at home. He was now twelve and a half, and when classes re-opened he was to go to Paris with his brothers, to be entered at Saint Barbe, which Charles was just quitting. Charles's examination for Saint Cyr* was now the

* Saint Barbe and Saint Cyr are notable French establishments for the education of boys.

subject of general thought in the family. He was not yet eighteen, and had plenty of time before him ; his father would not admit of the possibility of failure, even when the mother suggested it. One of M. Bessard's sons to be "plucked !"—he would not hear of such a thing !

Meantime Paul worked on, lamenting bitterly that he would not be at home to see the beautiful new mowing-machine which his father had bought. Madame Bessard had objected to the purchase at first, but her husband explaining to her that every year labour became dearer and machines more necessary, she yielded, and consented to this important acquisition to the establishment.

The "beast," as Pauline called it, had arrived from Paris two days before, and on the morrow was to be tried on the bit of lawn which had been especially left for it. Before using it for great undertakings M. Bessard wished to try how it would succeed in small ones.

"You are making matters very easy for it, my dear," said Madame Bessard. "It seems to me that there is on the lawn about a sixth part of

the hay that you will find in any other of your meadows."

"Never begin by difficult work, if you wish to show off before the eye of the public. Nor do I invite you to the performance. You are the sworn enemy of machines."

"Not at all: I like them much better than horses."

"Papa," begged Gustave, "may I rise very early in the morning and see you begin?"

"No; Denis and I shall begin alone. I mean to have a curtain all round the lawn to hide our proceedings."

"And where will you get it, papa? All the curtains in the house sewed together would not go round the lawn."

"Papa's will shall be the curtain, Lucie. I prohibit everybody from coming near the garden, and moreover I shall send everybody to make hay in a distant meadow—the Larières. If the machine succeed, I can then call you."

Next morning, when Paul was quitting the house with his packet of books on his back to go to

M. Darbois, he perceived his father crouched under the mowing-machine, hammering away at one of its wheels.

"Apparently it does not go quite smoothly," said he to himself; but ran off at once, for fear of his father's displeasure. However, he could not help telling what he had seen to M. Darbois, who, liking machines as little as Madame Bessard, rubbed his hands, saying,

"Ah! I told him he would do no good with all his array of scissors."

When Paul had worked a little, breakfasted twice, and lunched once, Madame Darbois put up a basket of strawberries for his mother and a nosegay for his sisters, and M. Darbois said suddenly,—

"Paul, I'll go home with you, and see for myself what your father is muddling over."

So they started off by one of those by-lanes, so plentiful in Normandy—very pleasant in summer, in winter rather doubtful—and soon arrived at the bottom of the garden belonging to La Vacherie. Paul ran forward, and stood spell-bound. M.

Darbois hastened to him. There they beheld the lawn completely mown, and the mowing-machine standing, like a triumphal car, in the midst of the grass. But the mower was not there.

"Your father will have gone to fetch his labourers," said M. Darbois, unwilling to acknowledge defeat.

"No, they are at the Larières. Papa could not get at them till noon, and they would not have had time to cut all this grass since then. It must be the machine that has done it. How proud papa will be !"

Talking thus, they approached the house. They entered the drawing-room—nobody was there : Paul ran up to his mother's bed-room—still nobody : he called his sisters and Gustave—nobody answered : he rushed to the kitchen—the laundry—but both Marie and Annette had disappeared.

"M. Darbois," cried he, "I don't know whether the mowing-machine has eaten them all up for its breakfast ; but certainly there is not a living creature in the house."

M. Darbois did not reply ; he was watching a cloud. "Look there !" said he at last to Paul.

"Ah! there is a storm coming, and all the hay lies in swathe, and there are no haymakers; I'll bet anything that is why papa carried off all the household to help. Let us run quickly to them."

"What!" said M. Darbois, "am I to turn haymaker, just when I was congratulating myself upon being no farmer?"

"But you would not like all our hay to be spoiled?" cried Paul, dragging him out of doors. "Make haste! even children are good for something."

The little boy ran as fast as he could, M. Darbois following. They found the whole family in the field: the two farm-servants, the shepherd, the cow-boy, Denis, Annette, Marie. Even Madame Bessard and the children were working hard, under the direction of M. Bessard, who was making haycocks with surprising rapidity. Gustave, standing on one of these, received valiantly great masses of hay, and if he was sometimes half buried beneath them, he jumped up again with indefatigable agility.

"Ah, you're there, Darbois!" cried M. Bessard,

seeing him at a distance. "Here is a pitchfork at your service. Make haste, Paul ; go with Marie and Annette, and begin another haycock. The storm gains upon us : we shall hardly finish before it comes. My dear Hélène," turning to his wife, "do rest awhile ; your son will take your place now."

Madame Bessard said she would go in and get refreshments ready. "Pauline, will you come too?"

"Oh no, aunt, I could not be spared, and I am not at all tired," rejoined the little girl, lifting with her fork about as much hay as a goldfinch would use to build its nest with.

"No," said her uncle, gravely, "I can't spare any of my labourers. Only go in, Hélène, or you will have a headache."

Madame Bessard did not mention that she had one already—but walked slowly back to the house, while M. Darbois took up his fork, and began working with a melancholy air.

Nevertheless he did work, and so did all ; and just as the last haycock was finished, the first thunder-drop fell. The storm burst upon them

before they could get back to the house. Everybody was wet through except Pauline, whom her uncle wrapped up in his coat and carried in his arms. Poor M. Darbois was the wettest of them all, as he could not run, and was quite exhausted with his unwonted labours.

Arrived at La Vacherie, everybody changed their clothes, and M. Darbois appeared in those of M. Bessard, much too long and too large for him. Madame Bessard saw how this annoyed the good man and brave soldier, who in all his campaigns had contrived to pay the most scrupulous attention to his toilette, so she whispered to Paul that Annette must dry their guest's clothes first, and in less than an hour M. Darbois appeared in his usual costume. The children were delighted with their day's feat, and especially with the gooseberry syrup which crowned it—a festive beverage very rare in this house, and only given on such occasions as a storm in harvest-time, and so on. While they drank, they did not fail to chatter much of their several and superhuman efforts, and the success which had followed them.

When all had taken breath a little, and the rain was still beating against the windows, M. Bessard asked his friend why he had come to La Vacherie through this burning sun ? was it to see the success of the new mowing-machine ?

" I am afraid I came rather in the hope of witnessing its failure," said M. Darbois, laughing.

" I assure you," said Madame Bessard, " that I—even I, who doubted it—must own I never saw anything prettier. It cuts the grass as close as the best mower, and lays down the swathes perfectly. I hope we shall end by the hay making itself, and stacking itself too, of its own accord."

" I fully expect it, Madame, and that is Bessard's great ambition. Though he says nothing—not wishing quite to overwhelm us with his triumph—he is as proud as possible. Nevertheless, I should like to see his machine in long grass."

" It would do equally well, my dear friend ; and if this rain should end, I beg to invite you and Madame Darbois to breakfast at the Larières next Wednesday, and see it work. I am so sure of it

now, that I wish to give everybody the pleasure of looking on."

"Children, also, papa?" begged Lucie.

"Children also." At which there was a great shout of thanks.

Here Paul cried out that the rain had ceased, and he wanted at once to go out and see the mowing-machine and the work it had accomplished.

"So do I," said M. Darbois, "and then I will go home. Adieu, Madame, till Wednesday. I only hope your husband will not expect us to eat hay for breakfast, proud as he is of cutting it all alone."

"Be content; I will promise you something besides hay," said Madame Bessard, laughing.

"Thanks; I will depend upon you, then," said M. Darbois, as he went off with M. Bessard and Paul.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE COLZA HARVEST.

WEDNESDAY came. Breakfast at the Larrières was turned into a sort of pic-nic, to which Madame Darbois had contributed a roasted turkey and a superb pie. Madame Bessard joked about the frugal meal of hay which apparently M. Darbois had so much dreaded ; but the children found these unforeseen provisions not to be despised.

It was the loveliest weather possible ; and thanks to his mowing machine, all M. Bessard's hay was cut, dried, and stacked before he had need to think of his colza.*

* Colza, or colewort, is grown plentifully all over Normandy. It is a bright yellow-flowering plant—at a distance looking not unlike wild mustard : from it is manufactured the colza oil.

Ten days before, the colza plants, heavy with their husks, had been cut down, and ranged along the furrows to finish ripening, where, every morning, the children paid them a visit. It was the first year that M. Bessard had tried cultivating colza ; therefore, everybody took a lively interest in it. Madame Bessard declared that she wanted the colza to dress her children with next winter.

"What, aunt ! do you weave cloth out of the stalks ?" said Pauline, in great astonishment.

Lucie laughed at her. — "Two years in the country, and you don't yet know that they make oil from colza ?"

"Yes ; I know well they make oil out of the grain, but I fancied they might perhaps make something else out of the stalk, like flax or hemp, since aunt says she wants it to dress us with."

"She means that colza sells well, and she will buy us clothes with the money."

"Oh, I see. But what will be done with those large branches ?"

"They make litter for horses ; and, besides,

when all the oil is squeezed out of the grains, the refuse is made into flat cakes, which cows and oxen eat in winter."

"What a funny idea! Do my uncle's cows eat them?"

"Yes; and they look something like cakes of mud. You must have seen them in the stable."

"No. But how is the colza harvest got in, and made into oil?"

"I think they beat it; but we will go and ask papa—he is standing under that shed."

The two girls ran to M. Bessard, who was watching his men nail canvas across two large wooden frames, each with four feet and four handles.

"What are these things for, uncle?" asked Pauline.

"To carry colza—and little girls."

"The little girls would be very comfortable there—it is as soft as any litter. But why need the colza be taken such care of?"

"Because, being ripe, if it were carried carelessly, it would drop its grains on the field, like hay or corn."

Lucie asked when they would begin to carry it; she thought it was quite time. And Pauline wanted to know what those women there were stitching at?

"The colza will be carried to-morrow morning, with your approval, Mademoiselle Lucie, which I am delighted to receive. And, Pauline, those women are sewing curtains to prevent its feeling the cold air."

"Uncle, don't quiz me. Say what they are really making."

"A large sheet to spread on the ground, and beat the colza upon, in order that none of its grains may be lost."

"What a good idea, and how funny to see a carpet laid down on the field. Pauline, we'll make haste with our lessons, and perhaps to-morrow morning we shall get through them doubly quick, and mama will let us come here."

"Perhaps," said M. Bessard.

At eight o'clock next morning there was heard in the distance, a steady, regular sound.

"Who is hammering in the field?" asked Pauline.

"Nobody. It is the noise of the flail," said Gustave.

"But why did we not hear it sooner? Did they only begin work at eight o'clock?"

"They were busy arranging the beating-places, and pulling up all the stubble left of the colza plants, to make a smooth surface on which it might be beaten."

"How do you know that, Gustave?"

"Because I was in the field at six o'clock with papa, while you all were fast asleep. We only came back when the men went to their breakfast, and now they have finished, and are beginning work in good earnest."

"Silence, children," said Madame Bessard—for all this was whispered during lesson-time. "Gustave, is there anything about colza in your grammar? Pauline, do you know your poetry yet?"

"Not quite, aunt."

"Then make haste. Thirty-five minutes for seven couplets is perfectly ridiculous. And you, Lucie——"

Lucie began—

"How into vile lead is the pure gold changed!
In holy places is the pontiff slain:
Weep—faithless city—weep, Jerusalem,
Destroyer of the prophets. God has left
His ancient love for thee; and in his eyes
All foul becomes thy holiest sacrifice." *

"Not bad, Lucie," said her mother, "though I thought we should never have got past the slaying of the pontiff. Do you know what that word means?"

"Pontiff is the same as high-priest, is it not, mama?"

"Yes; and the slain pontiff was Zacharias, whom Joash ordered to be killed."

"Joash turned wicked?"

"And became so cruel, that he slew Zacharias, with whom he had been brought up in the Temple."

"What a horrible thing! I won't love him any more. And, mama, I'll try not to forget how naughty I am, and I will ask God to make me good."

"I hope so, child. Now, Pauline, your lesson."

We must make haste, if we wish to go and see the colza after breakfast."

This hope gave Pauline wings. She was actually not more than a quarter of an hour in putting her writing-case on the table, only five minutes in getting her pen, and ten in finding the page of the English book out of which she was translating. Lucie, who was much the quicker of the two—so quick, indeed, that she often had to do things twice over—to-day finished her lessons at exactly the same time as Pauline. By eleven o'clock, all the morning lessons were ended, and the children were free, after breakfast, till three in the afternoon.

"Have you begun work fairly, now?" asked Madame Bessard of her husband, who came into the hall looking as if he found its cool atmosphere much pleasanter than that outside.

"Yes, yes: we are working hard, and drinking lots of cider, I'll answer for it."

"Are you giving them cider?"

"It is in the bargain—and how could I refuse, such hot weather? Well, children, who will come with me and be broiled, after breakfast?"

"Me—me—me," cried all the children.

Madame Bessard said she would prefer to wait till evening ; and begged the girls not to take off their hats for fear of getting headache.

"I do believe, girls, your mother is afraid of spoiling your complexions. No fear ! Lucie is already as brown as a mole, and Pauline never gets tanned at all."

At half-past eleven everybody started, except Madame Bessard. Shé gave the children half an hour's grace, allowing them to remain out till half past three. They were to take their lunch with them, finishing it as they passed through the kitchen-garden by a grand feast of gooseberries.

"I hear the flails," said Pauline ; "the men are at work again."

"What odd times they eat at !" said Gustave.

"Yes. During harvest they change their usual hour of meals and rest, for others more convenient."

"Oh, what a pretty sight !" cried all the children, on perceiving the men ranged in a circle, striking with regular strokes the plants of colza,

which were emptied out before them from frames something like wheelbarrows.

"Papa," cried Gustave, "may I have a flail?"

"No ; you are just the height of the men's flails, and might receive a very dangerous blow. You may help the women to fill the barrows."

While he spoke, Lucie saw one of these coming, the same sort of which she had watched the making the day before.

"Papa said it was made to carry colza and little girls," cried she, and jumped into it. The men carried her to the place where the colza was being gathered ; then she sprang out of her equipage, and began helping the women to fill it. Gustave and Pauline joined her, and all three worked so hard that they were already quite hot when another barrow claimed their attention. Between this and a third, and a fourth, they had not a moment's repose.

"I am so tired," said Pauline. "Let us sit down and eat our gooseberries."

Lucie owned she was tired too, and proposed making a couch out of the colza husks.

"Just like girls!" cried Gustave. "You make such a fuss about work at first, and then stop, and say you are tired. Go to sleep, you lazy things!"

"And, Gustave, will you come and arrange a bower for us with the colza plants?"

"A bower! What nonsense. I suppose you want a shelter from the sun, that's all?"

"Yes. Do make it for us, and we will give you some gooseberries."

With the help of one of the men, Gustave succeeded in arranging for his sisters a sort of arbour, under which they installed themselves, sitting upon a heap of stones and colza husks.

"You are exactly the colour of a gooseberry," said Pauline to Lucie.

"And you are as red as a hundred-leaved rose. Look at Gustave—he is afraid of catching cold, seemingly."

For Gustave had buried himself up to his chin in a heap of husks, leaving only his face to be seen, and amused himself by making a series of frightful grimaces.

"Come and eat your gooseberries," cried the girls.

"I can't. You see I am taking a husk-bath, like the sand-baths they have in the South : papa told me of them. Give me my gooseberries here."

"But you have not a hand to take them with?"

"Then drop them into my mouth."

His good little sister quitted her shelter, and came towards him, when he jumped up and began leaping from heap to heap of the husks, laughing at her.

"It is too hot to run after you," said good-tempered Lucie ; "so if you want your gooseberries, you must fetch them." And she came back to Pauline, who was indignant at the tricks of Master Gustave.

Just then they heard their bower crackling over their heads, and were springing out for fear of being buried under the ruins, when they saw M. Bessard, who approached them softly, and seized Gustave just in time to prevent his throwing a quantity of colza plants over his sisters.

"Behave yourself, sir, or I'll send you back

home," said he. At which Gustave came meekly to sit beside the girls, who had the generosity to let him keep his gooseberries.

The three children finished their lunch, and then it was time to return. The sun was burning hot, and Pauline thought she never could walk home.

"Let us run, then," said Lucie ; "we shall arrive all the sooner."

"But we shall be hotter than ever."

"True ; but we shall have more time to rest ourselves in learning our lessons."

"Lucie thinks it resting to be learning lessons," said Gustave. "Never mind, it's all one. I mean to run."

So they all took hands, and scampered off, so fast that, when they reached the hall-door, they fairly dropped from exhaustion and breathlessness.

"No matter," said Lucie, as soon as she could speak, "here we are !"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE GARDEN.

LUCIE and Pauline had a garden of their own, though they sometimes condescended to assist Madame Bessard in tying up her pinks and cutting off her withered roses in the great garden—everybody's garden as they called it. Lucie, who was an enterprising damsel, became dissatisfied with the shape of her flower-borders.

“Pauline,” said she one day, “we must make a change in our flower-beds. When Charles comes home this year from that horrid school where they are teaching him military exercises, he shall not know our garden again.”

“But what are you going to do? I think it looks very pretty, with the turf in the middle, the walk, and the borders all round.”

"No, I have an idea!" said Lucie. "I will make in the four corners the names of the four boys, and in the middle have mama and papa's initials, yours and mine."

"How? I don't understand."

"You understand nothing! With flowers, of course. There shall be a C. in crocuses, a P. in pansies, a G. in gilly-flowers, and so on. It will be charming."

"I think it will be rather ugly," said Pauline, timidly.

Lucie grew very angry. "You think you know everything, but you don't. I say it will be extremely pretty; and I am a year older than you, and I ought to know things much better than you do."

"Well," said Pauline, "I had another plan in my head. I heard aunt say that vegetables were very dear this year, so I thought we might grow vegetables instead of flowers, and give them away to poor people."

"Then where shall we get the flowers for mama's room and our own?"

"We could gather them in the fields ; and besides, aunt often gives some of hers both to us and the boys."

"The boys had better have a vegetable garden also. When once we begin that system, we shall no longer have a place for any flowers. Still, I agree that your idea is a finer one than mine, and more easily carried out."

So the two little girls, fully reconciled, ran to find the boys, whom they discovered busy watching two rabbits which had been brought to them. The girls joined in admiring the little creatures.

"But where shall we put them ?" said Paul.

Gustave thought a proper house should be built for them.

"Of course, but in the meantime ?"

"There is in the stable-yard an old cask, open at top, half filled with hay ; it would do for them very nicely. Look, Pauline, did you ever see anything so pretty ? They are Himalayan rabbits, the man said so who brought them ; and besides, I was sure of it, for papa told me of some Himalayan rabbits he had seen at Caen, and how they

had hair as fine and soft as feathers. Touch them ; it is just like the neck of a swan."

"I never saw a swan," said Pauline.

"I forgot, you girls see nothing ; you never go from home. But there are four swans at Héryville ; I saw them one morning, when papa took me with him to pay a visit there."

While this conversation was going on, Paul had run away upstairs and burst into his mother's room like a bomb-shell, crying out,—

"Mama, may we have the cask ?"

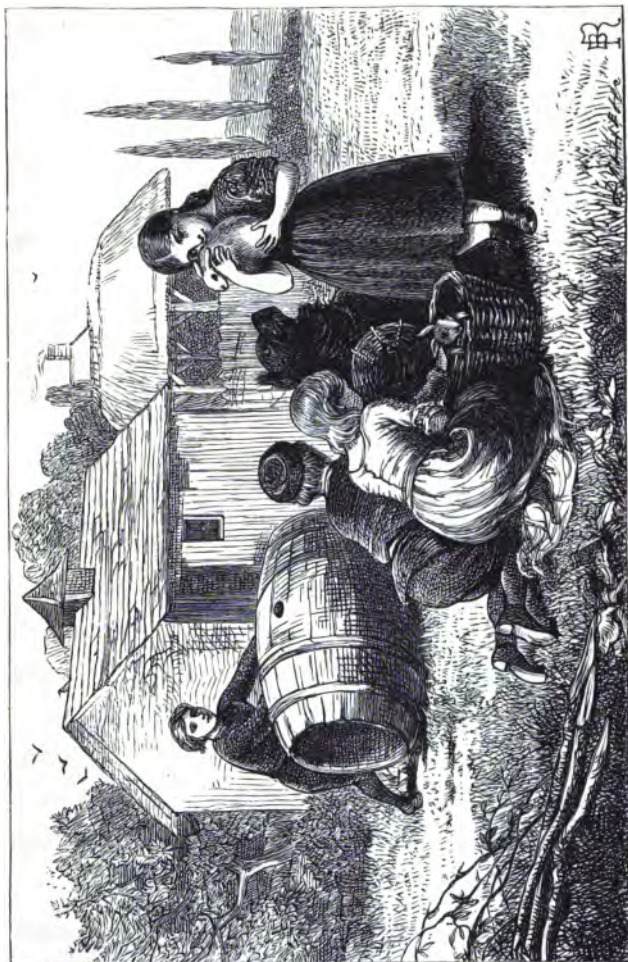
"What cask ?"

"The old cask in the yard. We want to put our rabbits in it ; the rabbits we got this morning."

"Anything you like ; only leave me a minute's peace, pray," said Madame Bessard, once more taking up her pen.

Paul came back triumphant, darted at the cask, and rolled it with a great noise to where his brother and sisters were all on their knees beside the basket which contained the rabbits.

"The cask is ours ! Now let us go after some hay."



THE RABBITS.



"Paul," cried Lucie, "Gustave tells us we girls see nothing. Just say how much time it would take him to see as much of the world as Pauline has done?"

"Oh! but I have forgotten it all. I was so little when I came here. I remember nothing but La Vacherie, except—except—my papa and mama."

Lucie put her arm tenderly round Pauline's neck, then she said: "Boys, I have a proposition to make to you; will you join your garden to ours, and grow vegetables for poor people? This year, they would be much more useful than flowers."

"But," said Paul, "I thought I heard you speak of borders of your own invention, and all sorts of pretty things that you were going to do?"

"So I was, but Pauline's idea was better."

"Ah! it was Pauline's then. All right! if it had been yours, I should have doubted it."

"Don't tease her; you're always teasing her," said Pauline. "Just tell us, will you grow vegetables in your garden? Ours alone is too little."

"For my part," observed Gustave, "I think

we have enough on our hands with having a rabbit-house to build."

"But we don't ask you to give us your garden to cultivate, only to do as we do."

"Very well," said Paul. "And if we build a rabbit-house in a corner of our garden, will you give us your cabbage-leaves? And do plant a great many cabbages—rabbits are so fond of them."

"And poor people also. Indeed, we should not give ourselves so much trouble only for your rabbits," exclaimed Lucie.

"No," added Pauline; "but we will give ourselves a little trouble to give the boys pleasure, and then they will help us as much as they can."

"Pauline always settles everything," said Gustave. "And now let us go and plan the rabbit-hutch."

The children had scarcely decided upon establishing the rabbits under a big tree, and placing them temporarily, in their cask, at another corner of the garden, when they heard themselves called for lessons. Hastily the basket was placed at the

opening of the cask, and Paul, who had a holiday to-day because it was Thursday, remained alone in the garden. His brother and sisters, who on other days worked much less hard than he did, enjoyed on Fridays only a quarter of a day's holiday, while he had a half one.

He walked up and down, his hands in his pockets, until he perceived six stakes, well-cut, well-sharpened ; but which looked as if they had lain a long time under shadow of the hedge, for the rain had much discoloured them. Paul's first thought was that they had been accidentally forgotten ; his next, should he take them for the posts of the rabbit-house ?

No sooner said than done. Paul seized a stake and dragged it, for he could not carry it, to the garden ; then went in search of a second, and finished by carrying away the whole six. He found a large mallet, and having with much pains set the stakes in their places, he struck on them with all his might. But he was still too small a boy : he could not reach high enough ; his efforts to drive them in were useless. So, putting three or

four big stones one on the top of the other, he tried to mount this extempore scaffolding, but still he was not tall enough. Finally, he set up on one end the cask destined for the rabbits, and climbed upon it. Then he could hammer at his ease, and the stake allowed itself at last to be driven into the earth. Two others followed, after which the young mason descended from his eminence in order to see about his lunch, which he ate so hungrily that his brother and sisters joined him at table before he had finished.

“What! you have had your lunch already?” said Gustave.

“Yes: I was so tired with hammering on those superb stakes I found. They will be just the thing for our rabbit-house.”

“Where did you find them?”

“Under the hedge; but come and see.”

“Capital! With branches between, they will make such a solid, good ——”

“But what will papa say?” interposed Lucie.

“Oh! papa will have forgotten them; they have been cut so long, they are quite grey and old-looking.”

"Still, you had better tell papa."

"I won't. Leave me alone. You may tell him if you choose."

"You know," replied Lucie with dignity, "that I am no tale-bearer. If you do bad things it is your own affair. You often get scolded because you have not listened to me. Come, Pauline, you and I have plenty of digging to do."

The garden was got into capital order, planted with cabbages, and sown with turnips, carrots, and beans — nay, they were thinking of making a potato-bed likewise ; and the rabbit-hutch began to look quite respectable, when, one day at breakfast, Denis knocked at the dining-room door.

"Come in," said M. Bessard.

Denis opened the door, and stood on the door-sill.

"I'm too dirty to enter, monsieur," said he. "Only I can't find the stakes which I cut in autumn to tie up the young trees to, and I want to know if monsieur has taken them for anything?"

"No : I have not even seen them. Have you asked at the farm if any one has touched them?"

"Yes, monsieur, and nobody has touched them.

Only Lucas, he says that—that—" And Denis looked steadily at Paul.

"What did Lucas say?"

"Lucas said, I suppose, papa, that he saw the stakes in my rabbit-house."

"Precisely, Monsieur Paul," interrupted Denis. "He did say that."

"I found them under a hedge, and I thought they were of no use, so I just took them."

"You ought first to have asked my permission, or your mother's."

Paul answered between his teeth, "Mama had told me that very morning to take anything I liked, so that I did not trouble her."

There was a pause, and then M. Bessard said : "I will forgive you, my boy, if you will not hide your misdoing under any more bad reasons. But you must give to Denis the twenty sous, which will be half a day's wages to the man who has to cut new stakes ; unless you like better to give up the old ones, and demolish your rabbit-hutch."

"No, certainly, papa. I shall have hard work

to earn the twenty sous ; but I should have much more to build my house up afresh."

Here Denis humbly begged the young gentleman's pardon ; but said he did want the stakes so much ; the young trees were all growing crooked for lack of support.

Had Paul been alone with Denis, perhaps he might have been rather cross ; but a look from his mother restrained him.

Breakfast was scarcely over when Pauline and Lucie rushed up to their room and then rushed down again, in search of Paul, who had gone off with Gustave to the rabbit-house.

"Here !" cried Lucie. "Here, Paul, are five sous of my money."

"And five more of mine," added Pauline. "So the matter will be equally divided if ——"

"And Gustave has already offered me ten sous. No, no, keep your money, all of you ; I don't deserve it. I ought to have listened to Lucie."

But when Paul entreated him, he agreed to keep ten sous and give back the rest. "And—and--I thank you all very much," said the boy, briefly.

"So it's all settled," said Gustave. "I give four sous and the girls three sous a-piece, that makes ten. Now let us go and look at the rabbits."

A fortnight after this, the rabbits were solemnly installed in their new habitation ; and were given, as a feast of rejoicing, so splendid a dinner of cabbages, that the eight little ones which had lately been added to the family were near dying of indigestion. However, thanks to the great medical skill and care of Gustave, they slowly recovered from their indisposition.

The garden was full of vegetables, and the little girls had made many promises concerning them to various poor old women, when one morning, Lucie, who had risen very early to water a small plantation of lettuces, entering the garden, uttered a cry of despair. Paul, just starting off to M. Darbois, his father being too busy to teach him that day, heard it and rushed to the spot. Pauline and Gustave also ran thither. What a scene of devastation presented itself ! No more cabbages ; scarcely even a lettuce ; the peas and the beans all ravaged and torn up ; the potatoes alone unhurt !

"It looks as if a whole army of rabbits had been here!" cried Paul. Then struck with a sudden idea, he flew to the rabbit-hutch. It was empty; all its inhabitants had disappeared. "Oh! my rabbits, my rabbits!" was all he said.

"And I shut the door close last evening; I am sure I did!" cried Gustave.

Lucie said that was true, but the wind could open it easily enough; she had found it open, and shut it herself once or twice when she was working in the garden. "But oh! what a quantity they have eaten—the wretches! It will be a month before we get any more cabbages, and Mother Bénard expects some on Monday next!"

"We must ask aunt to give us a few for her," suggested Pauline. "But is there no chance of our ever seeing the rabbits again?"

The wild rabbits might fight them, and then possibly they would return, Paul thought.

Lucie proposed putting a good dinner inside their house, in case, driven back from the woods, they might come to see if there was anything more to eat in the garden.

So, overnight, the hutch was filled with beautiful cabbage-leaves ; and at four in the morning, Paul, stealthy as a wolf, crept down to the garden. Denis was busy with his horses, so there was no one to disturb the little runagates, if they had come back. Paul stole on tip-toe to the rabbit-house, where he fancied he saw a glimmer of white that made his heart beat.

There they were, all his rabbits—old and young—devouring cabbage-leaves in their old familiar home ! Paul shut the door quickly upon them, and they were safe.

Then, taking out of his pocket a piece of pack thread, he fastened the hutch so that the wind could do no more mischief, and ran back to the house as fast as he could. Happily, on reaching it, the drawn blinds reminded him that it was still only four in the morning, and everybody must be sound asleep. He went quietly up to his own room. Gustave had not stirred ; but Paul could not settle to sleep again. So he busied himself with writing upon little bits of paper, which he stuck, on every door in the corridor :—

“TELEGRAPHIC DESPATCH—
The Rabbits have Returned.”

When, at half-past five, M. Bessard left his room, this important communication met his eye. Lucie and Pauline did not receive it till two hours later ; but then their joy was equal to that of Paul and Gustave.

On examination, it was supposed, from the quantity of fur missing from the backs of the eight little rabbits, and their generally forlorn appearance, that their wild cousins, the grey rabbits in the woods, had not given them an amiable reception ; and that therefore their father and mother, seeing their helpless condition, had thought it advisable to bring them back home.

CHAPTER XV.

SICKNESS.

PAUL'S going to college was delayed for six months in consequence of his having intermittent fever. He was now thirteen and a half, and his father was seriously anxious for him to begin his career in life. While boys remain at home, if they have no great passion for study, they work just because they are obliged, or to please their parents ; or else they do not work at all. But at college they must work : they become responsible creatures, which is the first step towards their becoming men.

Paul waited impatiently for the day of his departure. Charles and Edouard, home for the holidays, talked to him incessantly, the one of Saint

Cyr, the other of Sainte Barbe. Paul had not his brothers' craving for a military life ; he did not much care to see the world ; La Vacherie was enough for him. He loved few people, but these few most devotedly ; and was delighted at the prospect of helping his father and mother in their old age. His eagerness to start for college was because he might then the sooner leave it and come home.

His walks and talks with Edouard were interminable.

"Paul," said Edouard one day, "it is a great pity you are not entering at once into the upper school. I shall not see you half so often as I should like."

"Papa says it is best to be high in whatever class one enters. I shall be among the first ten in the fourth class, he hopes ; and I should have been down at the tail-end of the third."

"Yes, papa is right. Nobody cares for the exercises of the boys low down in the class : the professors hardly ever correct them at all."

"Then how do they find out their faults ?"

"They don't find them out ; but it's all the

same to the boys, who are bad scholars to the last. So papa is quite right : it is best to be high in a lower class. Look at Charles ; he was never below the five first, and the day he was fifth he put on such a tragic air ! But that only happened once."

" And you, Edouard ? "

" Me ! oh I was once seventh, and once actually ninth. But it was because I was thinking of something which I couldn't make out in my mathematics. How furious Charles was ! Take care, Paul. Don't disgrace the name of Bessard, or Charles will never look at you again ! "

Meantime, Charles used continually to sit talking with his mother, for whom his affection seemed to increase daily. As he grew older, he found out more and more that all mothers were not so good as his own. However busy he might be, every Friday a letter left Saint Cyr to comfort Madame Bessard's heart before she started for church on Sunday morning. She felt that her prayers had been granted — her eldest son, before becoming a soldier in earthly armies, was already a good

soldier in the great army of Jesus Christ. She was content.

But Charles, returning home, was not content about his mother. He often found her with hot hands and a troubled face ; she was easily fatigued, and the least agitation prevented her from sleeping. Tender as her husband was, with living constantly beside her, he did not perceive the great change in her so quickly as did her son.

One morning Charles and Lucie were walking in the shrubbery together. The child, who was just growing up into a young girl, dearly loved her eldest brother ; but long absences had lessened their intimacy, and besides, Charles was nine years the senior. Lucie had an anxious look in her little face : from time to time she opened her mouth to speak and could not find courage. At last she said in a disturbed voice,—

“ Charles, what do you think of mama ? ”

“ Mama ? oh, she is pretty well—not quite well, perhaps.”

“ Don’t you notice that she is very feverish of evenings ? ”

Charles stopped and looked his sister full in the face. "So you have noticed that too? I did, but thought I was mistaken. Papa does not seem anxious."

"Papa is out of doors all day, and does not see her half so much as I do. Besides, you know, mama loves him so dearly that when he comes in, she always bestirs herself, sits up on her sofa, arranges her hair, and begins chatting with him as if there was nothing the matter, even though the moment before she has been quite ill. Ah! women know how to hide their sufferings."

"And you are a woman, of course," said Charles, half-smiling. "But who has been giving you and Pauline your lessons lately?"

"We begged mama to let us work by ourselves, but she never would: however, we do all we can at our lessons without troubling her."

"I must speak to my father," said Charles, thoughtfully. "I am so sorry to disquiet him; he has cares enough; but it cannot be helped."

Charles and Lucie were mistaken: M. Bessard was more uneasy about his wife than they sup-

posed. As they returned to the house, they perceived a carriage at the door.

"That is M. Bertin's carriage," said Charles.

"I wonder if papa has fetched him, or if he has come to call accidentally. In either case, papa is sure to speak to him about mama, and he will see her, which is much better. Why have they not called us, Charles?" And entering, Lucie found the drawing-room empty. "Perhaps M. Bertin has gone up to mama's room to speak to her more freely. What a comfort! He will oblige her to take care of herself."

M. Bertin was an old physician, an intimate friend of M. Bessard's father, and acquainted with himself from his childhood. He was also much attached to Madame Bessard, and saw with alarm how ill she now was. After having talked with her, however, he felt a little reassured; advised rest and careful treatment. Then turning to M. Bessard, he changed the conversation by inquiring after the children.

"They are all here—the half-dozen complete. But three weeks will lessen the number. Charles

will go back to Saint Cyr, and Paul return with Edouard to Sainte Barbe."

M. Bertin had not taken his eyes off Madame Bessard, and he noticed that at these last words her colour rose. "Poor woman!" thought he, "what will she do when they are all divided from her—one in Algeria, one in China, and the third wandering about the world. She is already quite ill with the notion of Paul's going to Sainte Barbe. Luckily, he will soon come back again to her."

The good doctor remounted his carriage, however, saying only that he hoped Madame would take care of herself, and observe his directions, and that he would shortly return to see her again.

His prescription did so much good, that Charles departed with an easy mind, making Lucie promise to write him full accounts of his mother's health. Since he had discovered how wise his little sister was in this matter, he had quite made a friend of Lucie.

Paul left also, keeping up his spirits to the last moment. It was not until he embraced his mother and sisters, and gave his hand to Gustave,

who did not approve of kissing now, that he broke down and was nearly crying. His father put his hand on his shoulder—

“Courage, my boy!” whispered he. “Courage, for your mother’s sake!”

So Paul jumped into the carriage without another look at those he was leaving.

This time the father did not accompany his sons to Paris. Edouard was quite capable of establishing Paul at Sainte Barbe, and M. Bessard declared he was too busy to leave the farm; but the real truth was, he did not like to leave his wife.

Madame Bessard guessed it all. For some days she contrived to keep her grief in the depth of her heart, and deceive both her husband and Lucie with the belief that she was much better; Pauline alone was more quick-sighted. Brought up with a sick father and a delicate mother, the child had learned when quite young to notice their least changes, and now all these old memories came back to her. Her aunt never sat down with a weary, worn-out look, but Pauline was sure to see it; and when Madame Bessard took a slight

cold, and coughed all night, she said to Lucie, "Aunt is ill, I am sure."

"Oh, no ; it is only a cold, I trust."

"Touch her hands to-morrow morning when we go into her room, and you will see how feverish she is. I wish M. Bertin would come here again."

"Let us speak to papa—here he is. Papa, mama is coughing very much. Could not M. Bertin come and see her without her knowing he was sent for?"

"I have written, and he will be here to-morrow."

Pauline only hoped he might find her aunt still about the house, but she doubted it. Nor was she wrong. Madame Bessard had kept up until the last ; her strength was quite gone ; and during the night a slight attack of delirium warned her family how serious her illness had become. M. Bertin, uneasy at M. Bessard's letter, arrived early in the day, and declared her to be suffering from inflammation of the lungs.

"How is she to be nursed?" asked he. "These girls are so young—mere children."

“ Oh, but we are old enough to nurse mama, with papa’s help and Annette’s,” they cried.

“ Good ! you have Annette with you still ; she has seen much sickness, and is a careful nurse. That will do ; so, children, try your best. Where you fail, Annette will help you. There is not very much to be done.”

M. Bessard agreed to this plan and to his daughter’s entreaties ; besides, it was not easy to find a nurse who wholly satisfied M. Bertin. So Pauline and Lucie took turns in the sick-room all day.

The fever was strong upon Madame Bessard ; she slept much, and scarcely spoke ; from time to time she seemed to pray softly ; then came moments when she evidently did not know what she was saying ; she would call her sister, Madame de Léonsac :—

“ Marie, Marie, why don’t you come and see me ? You stay so long away. Perhaps you are tired ? Well, lie down on that sofa. Where is my husband ? I fear he has been wounded ! Those wicked Arabs !”

Then her voice would sink into silence, while the poor little nurse could hardly keep from tears.

It was sowing-time at the farm, and M. Bessard was occupied with indispensable affairs which he dared not neglect; still he came to and fro incessantly into his wife's room. But she did not always know him, and often it happened that at the very moment he was bending over her, she would cry out, "Henri! Henri! where are you gone? Will you never come and see me?"

The day seemed very long. Pauline kept watch in her aunt's room until Annette came to send her down to dinner. There, sad faces gathered round the table: M. Bessard, pale, and with his lips tightly pressed together, seemed scarcely to see anybody; Gustave, utterly bewildered without his mother, kept looking continually towards the door, as if he expected to see her enter.

Lucie and Pauline were very sad; but during their long day of watching by the sick-bed, they had had time to look the danger in the face, to pray God to avert it from them, and mean-

time to give them courage to nurse her whom they loved so well.

Pauline could not eat.

"But you must eat, dear," said Lucie, in a low voice. "How can we have strength to nurse mama, if we eat nothing?"

So Pauline, imitating her cousin, swallowed a few mouthfuls.

M. Bessard was to sit up all night; Lucie begged him to go to bed at eight o'clock, and she would wake him at midnight. Worn out by his anxiety, and his hard work in the fields besides, the father consented. But first, he called all his children round him, read them the ninety-first Psalm with a firm voice; and then they all knelt down and he prayed God to have pity upon both parents and children.

No one counts time in a sick-chamber. Pauline and Lucie could hardly have told how many days they spent beside their mother's bed, listening to the tender words she used to say to them in her delirium:—praying to God for her, and waiting for His hand to deliver them from their misery.

At length, one day, Madame Bessard woke after an hour's sleep, and opened her eyes with a calmer expression. Lucie, approaching her bed, found her hands less hot than they were. The mother looked up fondly, and said in a low voice,—

“ My poor little girl, how tired you must be !”

“ Not at all, mama,” said Lucie, repressing all her joy, for fear of agitating her mother. But she and Pauline fell on their knees behind the curtains, at the foot of the bed, in thankfulness for even this glimmer of hope.

M. Bertin confirmed the good news ; and during the rest of the day Madame Bessard's progress was so rapid that she was soon pronounced convalescent. Very feeble still ; but if there were no relapse she might be considered saved.

It was time. Pauline, who had never given way for an instant until now, showed signs of extreme fatigue. M. Bessard, who had sat up every night, while going about his farm-work all day, seemed to have grown ten years older in as many days. Lucie alone did not appear worn out, though she had scarcely quitted her mama all day long, and

had risen several times in the night to come for tidings of her. But the child's strength of mind and body had developed according to her need. M. Bessard was very proud of his daughter, and M. Bertin declared he would give to Mademoiselle Lucie any day a certificate as sick-nurse.

"Poor children!" said Madame Bessard, sadly, one morning when she lay looking at her two busy little daughters, "how I have made them lose their time!"

"Don't regret it, H  l  ne," said her husband. "During your illness they have learnt a more useful lesson than any which books could teach them."

One month after the day when she first took to her bed, Madame Bessard came down into the drawing-room for the first time. Her daughters had found in the garden a few green branches, with which they had filled the vases. On the table, near the sofa, was a bunch of roses.

"Whence came these?" asked she, as soon as she was settled in her pillow. "Roses in the month of November!"

"Charles sent them, mama. They arrived this

morning from Paris. It was his answer to my letter, in which I told him, for the first time, how very ill you had been. For if he had known all the truth, nothing would have kept him at Saint Cyr."

"It was best so. Oh, my dear, dear children!" said Madame Bessard; and, joining her hands together, she thanked God from the bottom of her heart for her recovery.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DEPARTURE.

MADAME Bessard regained health very slowly.

It was the end of November ; and the weather was mild for Normandy : still she was kept indoors far too much. If she tried to walk, she grew tired immediately ; driving shook her ; and it was too cold to remain sitting in the open air. Her husband noticed all this ; but silently. At last, one morning, when M. Bertin was calling, he proposed accompanying him to Vire and returning on foot, as he said he had business in the town.

“ I can’t imagine why your father should choose this long walk,” said Madame Bessard to Lucie, after the two gentlemen had driven off together. “ He had much better have taken Will-o’-the-Wisp, and ridden to Vire.”

"Perhaps Will-o'-the-Wisp is wanted for the farm, mama. And papa likes walking."

"Still, three leagues ; and in the month of November !"

"Mama, shall I read aloud ? You look tired with talking."

"Yes. Take Rollin : it is time to begin our regular studies."

"But Rollin will weary you. May I not continue Lord Dufferin's Travels ?"

"No, no. I like Rollin, he is a friend of my childhood," replied Madame Bessard.

Lucie had wished to take off her mother's attention from her father's doings. She herself was convinced he had gone with M. Bertin in order to have a long and serious conversation with him about her mama ; but she did not wish this idea to enter Madame Bessard's own mind.

Two hours passed, between reading and talking ; and then came an old woman, most anxious to recommend a certain drink which she was certain would bring back Madame's strength as if by magic. The old soul was so garrulous and long-

winded, that M. Bessard appeared before his wife had time to fidget about his absence. He looked quite animated, and began to talk of all the people he had seen at Vire, and the news he had brought from thence. Madame Bessard listened eagerly at first, then, seeing that there was nothing very interesting to hear, she sank back on her pillows with a weary air. Lucie dared not ask her father what M. Bertin had said ; and he himself said nothing.

But about a week after, he entered the drawing-room with a cheerful air.

“ H      , you may begin packing your trunks ; for you are going next Monday to visit your three sons in Paris, and from thence to Hy       for the winter.”

At her husband’s first words, Madame Bessard had eagerly raised herself up ; but at his last she looked at him as if she thought he had lost his head.

“ To Hy       !” repeated she.

“ Yes, my dear, to Hy      . You need a warm climate to re-establish your health.”

"But the money? And your business?"

"Money—well, I have got it. And my business—I have settled all about that."

"But how? Since when?"

"Eight days ago I asked Bertin seriously to tell me in what state of health you were. He answered, 'that he had no fear for you, but that he would be glad to see the winter over—you would require strength in spring.' I suggested that we should go in search of spring. He looked at me much as you do now; and asked how it was possible? I said, if it were impossible, I would manage to do it—for you. 'Then,' said he, 'take her south, to Hyères, Algeria, Pau, anywhere that she can find the sun and a mild atmosphere. So we ended by deciding in favour of Hyères, and I am taking you thither on Monday with your two daughters."

"But, husband, you forget—all this travelling—"

"Would ruin me, if there were not in question something far more precious than money. Besides, I am a rich man to-day: I sold yesterday the Larières."

"Your best field ! oh, Henri, why did you do that ?"

"In order to have the pleasure of travelling with you, my dear. I shall leave all my affairs in the hands of Paul Sambois, who is quitting old Grignon, and will establish himself at the farm during my absence. He is as honest as he is intelligent, which is saying a great deal."

"What, little Paul Sambois ?"

"He would not call himself little ! and he is twenty-two years old. He was with his father three months, and now desires a better situation. When I come back I shall be able to give him a good recommendation ; and meantime he can earn it by practising farming here."

Madame Bessard made no more objections, but held out her hand to her husband, who pressed it hard, and went out, saying,

"Now I must announce this wonderful news to your two girls."

At first Lucie only took in one fact, that her mother had to be sent to the south for her health. She must then be very ill, indeed. The poor

child turned frightfully pale, and said in a choking voice,—

“Anything, papa, anything to save her.”

M. Bessard answered tenderly that it was not so serious a case as this: only mama was delicate after her terrible illness, and required everything that could restore her strength. “But, my child, M. Bertin assured me there was not the least danger; after a winter passed in a warm climate she will be just as strong as ever. You know our dear Normandy is not the mildest possible place in winter-time.”

Lucie smiled through her tears, and said she agreed to that—for the first time.

“Yes; for I have heard you saying that, take it for all in all, La Vacherie was a finer climate than Naples! I am glad to see that, when the matter concerns your mother, you will condescend to hear reason. So, on Monday we depart for Paris. I will leave Gustave at Sainte Barbe: he would lose so much time in idling at Hyères.”

“Oh, uncle, must we lose all our boys?” whispered Pauline.

"You are right, child: I will think it over once again. Now, girls, take care that your mother does not fatigue herself with packing."

M. Bessard left the two children looking anxiously at one another: Lucie wept still. Pauline, habitually the calmer of the two, kissed her to give her courage. Shortly, Madame Bessard's calling them made them both suppress all outward signs of trouble.

Lucie shut up in her heart all her anxieties, and decided not to speak of them, even to Pauline. She knew that God was teaching her by means of sorrow; and she could tell it all to Him.

"Well, children," said Madame Bessard, as they entered, "what say you to your father's plans?"

"It seems to me an excellent idea, mama: I am only ashamed that I did not think of it myself."

"You, Lucie! are you my doctor?"

"But, aunt," interposed Pauline, "my uncle is no doctor, and he thought of it."

"Ah, your uncle!" and Madame Bessard stopped.

Lucie and Pauline knew enough of papa's love for mama to understand why he had found means to carry out a scheme which M. Bertin himself had never suggested, because he believed it totally impossible.

"Only, mama," said Lucie, drying up the last tear—a very little one: "we must make our conditions with you. You must not fatigue yourself: you may give all your orders from your sofa; but you must not stir. Besides, I know where all our things are; and can arrange everything necessary."

"And I," said Pauline, "I will serve as a pair of hands to execute Lucie's orders."

"Between us two and Annette, everything will be managed beautifully, mama. You will promise to be quiet?"

"I must, if I am to keep myself strong for travelling. Not that I can promise to let you do just as you like. But I want to get well, my children. My illness costs your father too dear."

"A capital reason to take care of yourself, aunt. Still it seems to me you might also consider us a little," said Pauline, laughing.

"Now, mama," said Lucie, eagerly, "shall I go and choose what dresses we are to carry away with us?"

"Gently, gently, my child. And do let Pauline and me have a voice in the matter, pray."

The discussion on clothes—what was to be taken and what left—lasted as long as if the mother and daughters had had a very large wardrobe. This was not the case exactly; but every one knows that it is more difficult to dress suitably when one is not rich, than to dress elegantly when one has plenty of money at one's disposal.

Sempstresses were sent for, there were taken out of drawers and brought down to the drawing-room all sorts of light dresses, which ordinarily would not have been touched till spring. One was to be lengthened, a new body made to a second, new sleeves to a third; and the consultation over, M. Bessard, coming in at dinner-time, found his wife so exhausted that he scolded the family all round.

"If you make so much fuss over your arrange-

ments, I will carry you all three off with simply a clean handkerchief in your pocket," said he. "You can buy ready-made clothes on the way."

"Thank you, uncle ; but our 'clothes,' by which I suppose you mean dresses, would run a chance of fitting very badly. If you please, I had rather take mine with me. But aunt shall fatigue herself no more—she has given all her orders, and Lucie and I will take care that they are executed."

So, during the whole week, the two girls were so busy, that when they went to bed at night, instead of lying awake chattering, they both fell sound asleep immediately, in order to rise early next morning. Lucie, with Pauline's assistance, marked all the winter provisions that were to go to the market, and those that were to be left in the house for the use of M. Paul Sambois. A third portion had to be packed up and taken to Hyères for their own use. Likewise, one after the other, every room in the house had to be dismantled, the carpets taken up, the furniture and beds carefully covered ; and a complete inventory made of everything.

Madame Bessard, herself order personified, had brought up her daughters in excellently neat habits ; still, she suffered much from being compelled to remain idle while everybody around her was working. Her sweet patience and submission were sorely taxed many a time when she saw Lucie enter her room all in a hurry, for something or other, and perceived by the child's pale cheeks that her task was almost beyond her strength.

The drawing-room had been left undisturbed until the very last day. Marie, who was to remain as servant to M. Paul Sambois, had the charge of keeping the house clean. Denis was to cultivate the garden and sell the vegetables, which would pay his wages, and those of Marie. Annette was to accompany the family to Hyères.

It was Sunday night ; and all arrangements had been finished on the Saturday. M. Bessard took his daughters to church, and on returning, they said good-bye to all the villagers, whom they were in the habit of taking care of, more or less. These poor people could hardly be prevented from coming in a body to implore Madame Bessard not to go


away. Poor Lucie rushed from the last cottage in anguish, for the old woman had said to her, "Oh, mademoiselle, you may take madame away, but suppose you never bring her back again! Far better to let her die at home."

Pauline dragged her cousin away; and the two girls had to sit down awhile at the roadside before they could recover themselves sufficiently to return to La Vacherie.

It was needful to start early in order to reach Paris ere night. M. Bessard's brother, Paul's godfather, was to receive the travellers; and Madame Bessard was promised faithfully she should see her sons next day. The general officer at Saint Cyr had given Charles special leave of absence to go and see his mother, adding,

"And say to her from me that your conduct since you have been here has been above all praise."

"I hope your father will come to Saint Cyr," said one of his comrades who overheard this speech; "else I am sure your mother will know nothing at all about it."



In truth Charles was so modest that it cost him an effort to deliver the general's message ; but he was rewarded when he saw what a colour it brought into his mother's pale cheeks.

" God bless thee, my son ; and give thee grace still to continue to serve Him !" said she, in a whisper, as she pressed him in her arms.

Edouard and Paul stayed two days with their uncle, which caused Gustave to be much perplexed in mind between the desire of seeing himself in the uniform of a young collegian of Sainte Barbe, and the pleasure of going to the Mediterranean. His father, however, cut the matter short, and decided to take him to Hyères.

" Your daughters say that you are not strong enough to do without all your boys, Hélène," said he, smiling.

And Madame Bessard was quite of that opinion.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SOUTH.

THE family quitted Paris with some regrets that they could not remain there longer. Madame Bessard found it hard to bid adieu to her sons ; but one day, colder than usual, had brought back her cough, so it was decided to depart without delay. Edouard and Paul accompanied her to the railway ; but Charles was obliged to go back to Saint Cyr before night. Poor boy, he forgot he was a man, and wept as if he had been only ten years old.

Her prayers comforted Madame Bessard, and on the morrow she was able to bid good-bye to Paul and Edouard without any breaking down. They would not quit her till they had settled her

in the invalid-carriage which her husband had secured.

"Ah! but this was an extravagance," said she, as she stretched herself on the comfortable bed; "I am sure I could have travelled very well in an ordinary carriage."

"It is possible you could, my dear; but at this present time you must be treated like a princess. Afterwards, when you have recovered your strength, you may become a farmer's wife again, and be more economical than ever."

"I doubt if many princesses are taken care of like mama," said Lucie; "they have not often about them people who love them as well as we love our dear little mother."

"Your words are the words of wisdom, mademoiselle," replied M. Bessard; "meantime, help me to clear the cushions of all these packages. Remember, we must make ourselves content here for the next twenty-four hours. One advantage of your bed, Hélène, is, that we shall not be obliged to stop at Lyons, and a night at an hotel would have cost us much more than an invalid-carriage."

"So you have spoiled me in this manner for the sake of economy? You will next tell me, that it is for economical reasons we are going to winter at Hyères?"

"Not at all. I simply explained that the arrangement was not dearer than any other, especially considering that it is our best policy, as a family, to cure you as fast as possible."

Pauline was the only one of the children who knew the Paris and Marseilles railway. When, thirteen years before, M. and Madame Bessard had returned to France, they had gone up the Rhone first, and then the Saône, as far as Châlons, in a very slow and very dirty steamboat; and the young folk naturally remembered nothing of the journey. M. Bessard was delighted he had arranged to start at night, for, next morning, all were able to enjoy the beauty of the country they passed through. From Lyons to Avignon, the pure blue of the sky, the mildness of the temperature, and the increasing brilliancy of colour everywhere, enchanted Madame Bessard, who seemed already quite another person. Her husband and children

looked at her much oftener than they did at the landscape ; but M. Bessard had drawn her bed close to one of the windows, and every minute she was calling them to notice something or other. When they reached Marseilles, she was tired, but not suffering much. Pauline and Gustave went with M. Bessard to see the town a little, but Lucie absolutely refused to quit her mother.

At noon they had once more to take the railway from Marseilles to Toulon, then the diligence, which would arrive at Hyères the same night. The wearisome journey would soon be over ; but Lucie longed to see her mother settled at home, or what was home for the time, able to rest and enjoy at her ease the sun, the warmth, and the delicious sea.

Madame Bessard, less impatient than her daughter—for added years had taught her to wait quietly—did not disturb herself about anything, but looked at home even in the inn-chamber where she only required to stay a few hours. Whilst Lucie finished packing, and then fidgeted from one window to another, watching for her father's re-

turn, the mother read her chapter, laid the Testament down, and silently prayed. Afterwards she spent the time of waiting in writing a letter to her sons.

"There they are!" said Lucie, at last. "And how hot they look. Mama, if we were back at La Vacherie, how people would open their eyes if we complained of being too hot on the 5th of December! But come—I want my breakfast."

"Certainly, child; it is ten o'clock. Well, Pauline, would you like to live at Marseilles?"

"No, aunt. The harbour smells horribly; everybody looks so busy, and there are no shops and no libraries."

"That settles the point," said M. Bessard. "Mademoiselle Pauline de Léonsac does not approve of Marseilles, consequently it is a doomed town. The inhabitants will never get over it."

"Oh, uncle, you are beginning to tease me again."

"I could not presume so far, mademoiselle. But whether or no, come to breakfast, or we shall lose the train."

The journey from Marseilles to Toulon, picturesque at certain points, was effected without difficulty ; but that from Toulon to Hyères, in a horrible little diligence, was so fatiguing, that Madame Bessard had scarcely strength left to get out of the carriage. It was a rough night, and Lucie dreaded her mother's falling ill at the hotel. But next morning the weather turned so fine, and the sun was so warm, that M. Bessard carried his wife into the garden, placed her in charge of Annette, and told his daughter that rest and mild air would be the best remedies, and he needed her company in search of a house.

Hyères is not a very large place, and the greater part of the houses were already let, so M. Bessard had some difficulty in finding what he wanted. However, at last he discovered, a little way out of the town, in a fine situation overlooking the sea, a very small house, which contained all they really needed. It was only one story, and consisted of a very good bedroom, a pretty parlour, and two other bedrooms, very small. To be sure there was no paper on the walls of the garret,

and the first thing they saw on entering the kitchen was a large scorpion. But the rent was moderate, and it would be easy to make Madame Bessard almost as comfortable as if she were at home. Besides, her room was due south, and beautifully warm.

At Toulon, M. Bessard had given orders that the trunks sent by luggage-train should be forwarded here ; and on the morrow Lucie went with Annette to receive them, and make the first indispensable arrangements before the invalid could be brought to the house.

Annette was born near Vire, in Normandy, but she had accompanied Madame Bessard to Algeria as maid, so she was accustomed to campaigning, and knew how to make the most of her resources. But nobody is perfect, and Annette had a bad temper. When she found herself in any perplexity—obliged to “stand fire” as she said—it was advisable to keep out of her way. So Pauline and Lucie devoted all their time to the parlour and to Madame Bessard’s room, leaving Annette to arrange the other part of the house as she chose ;

which she did, keeping up a rolling fire of grumblings loud and deep against the dirtiness of people who pretended to let houses, and who did not even know how to sweep them.

The next day everything absolutely necessary was done. Lucie, whose face and hands were all inflamed, as if she had been stung by gnats, was in the act of hanging a mosquito-curtain round her mother's bed, when she saw her father arrive leading a little carriage, no bigger than an arm-chair, and drawn by a donkey, which he had hired for his wife. It was already the close of the day—and days are not long in the month of December, especially in a country where the sun disappears all in a minute. Lucie was thankful to establish her mother speedily on a very hard sofa, which she tried to make softer by means of many pillows.

Madame Bessard looked round ; her favourite vase was beside her, filled with flowers ; her basket, her work-box, all that she was accustomed to use, were ready to her hand. Even her books were already unpacked, and scattered about the

table, and the likenesses of her three absent sons were hung over the chimney-piece. She drew her two daughters to her, and closely embraced them.

"You feel a little at home, aunt?" whispered Pauline.

"I am always at home when I have you all beside me. And this really looks like home."

"Oh, mama!" cried Lucie.

"Am I insulting La Vacherie? Well, wait till to-morrow morning, and the sun will make all right."

It was a constant happiness to M. Bessard and his children to see the delight their dear invalid took in the sun. She revived daily in this atmosphere, so mild and pure and delicious. The garden was small, but sunshiny and well sheltered; and the view of the sea was superb. Every day, after breakfast, Madame Bessard would settle herself in her arm-chair under a little bower of citron-trees, and from thence, with her book or her work in her hand, she would watch this beautiful sea, too far off for her to be able to reach it, but which offered to her a spectacle always new. Every day,

too, she walked ; and her children noticed that the walk grew longer and longer, yet still she was not fatigued when she came in. They had scarcely dared to hope for such rapid progress, and could not be thankful enough.

Soon she began to work in the garden, having Annette within call. Then M. Bessard ventured to take, with his children, long expeditions up the mountains. Lucie, whatever she might say, had been much worn out by nursing her mother. Pauline was growing fast, and not strong. Gustave was always ready for a walk, especially when he thereby escaped a lesson ; so these rambles were a benefit to the whole family. They used to come back with handfuls of green leaves ; sometimes they even found an early flower, and their vases, of brown sun-baked earth, were always covered with garlands of ivy.

Bedtime was very early. M. Bessard took upon himself all the teaching, and insisted on his pupils being in the sitting-room by seven every morning. At nine, Lucie or Pauline helped Madame Bessard to dress, the one who did not officiate as maid becom-

ing housekeeper, and looking after domestic affairs. Then study was resumed from ten till eleven. At noon they took a walk, and from three to six they prepared their lessons for the next day. Gustave was spurred to emulation by finding out that "the girls," younger than himself, were forwarder than he was in many things; but he took refuge in his Latin, and declared that, if it were not for that horrid grammar, which took up all his time, and the endless exercises and translations he had to do, his historical extracts would have been as good as Pauline's, and his English exercises far better than Lucie's.

Theoretically, Pauline aided Lucie in the management of the house, which, with some slight supervision, Madame Bessard had delegated to the two girls. She was determined to do her best to get well, and knew that any household work would fatigue her terribly. They had taken, to assist Annette, a country girl, who happily did not know French well, and had a great desire to learn it, and who besides had a high opinion of Annette's capabilities. So she was very submissive, and though

Annette scolded Gothon freely, she nevertheless spent all her rare moments of leisure in making clothes for the girl's old mother, who lived hard by.

Lucie ruled everything and everybody, even Annette sometimes. For Pauline, she would not even have given out a pound of sugar without consulting her cousin ; and M. Bessard, satisfied with the order and economy of the household, and happy in seeing his wife enjoy a complete rest, caressed Lucie, and flattered her self-love by placing in her absolute confidence.

Gustave also had got a habit of going to his sister for everything, even as he used to do to his mother. Madame Bessard alone, when they all praised Lucie's cleverness and foresight, did not look perfectly satisfied. One morning she sat watching the two girls busy at cutting out frocks, in which Pauline, very adroit with her fingers, had a far better notion of how things should be done than she had in house affairs. She hazarded some objection, which was a daring exploit, seeing that Lucie had only confided to her the making of the skirts.

"I assure, you, Lucie, that by trimming the sleeves with folds, we shall use up much less stuff than in these large frills, and they will look equally pretty."

"Let me alone," said Lucie. "You mind your skirts ; I wish to cut out these dresses after my own taste."

"Suppose we ask aunt's advice ?"

"I don't need anybody's advice. As if I couldn't cut out a sleeve without mama !"

Here Madame Bessard approached the scene of discussion. "May I ask, my dear, on what subject you are thus infallible ?"

"Oh, on more subjects than one, aunt," said Pauline, laughing.

Lucie said sharply, "It is not a question of infallibility, mama, but of a sleeve, which Pauline will not let me cut out to my own liking."

"It seems to me that you rule Pauline, and prevent her doing what she wishes, much oftener than she you. Take care, take care, my daughter."

Lucie cast down her eyes, abashed, and made no reply.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SPRING

THE almond-trees had been in flower ever since January ; and the children made nose-gays of them without much troubling themselves about the almond-harvest of the proprietor of the house. Madame Bessard was no longer satisfied with strolling about the garden, but took rides, on the back of an ass. The donkey-chair had been returned to its owner, but the beast itself was established under a shed, and a little boy in the neighbourhood came to groom it of mornings and to feed it at night.

This boy was a sort of gipsy. One day, when Lucie was going out with her father, she perceived the little fellow standing at the garden-door : he

asked charity in a voice so weak that she was touched with compassion, and begged permission to fetch him a bit of bread from the kitchen. As soon as he saw it he trembled all over, then darted upon the morsel like a wild beast, and devoured it in a fashion which showed plainly he had told the truth when he said he had eaten nothing for two days.

From this time the little gipsy conceived the warmest attachment to Lucie. He declared she had saved his life, and there was nothing he would not do for her. The loveliest mountain flowers, the greenest branches, the prettiest and most polished stones from the bed of the stream, he gathered and brought as offerings to his benefactress. In return, Lucie often gave him something to eat ; and M. Bessard found for him a few clothes as substitutes for the miserable rags he had on when they first made his acquaintance.

The poor child might be about seven or eight years old. He said he had neither parents nor friends : that as long as he could remember he had travelled about with a troop of people who lived

under a tent, under bridges when the streams beneath were dried up, or by river-sides. Two months ago he had hurt one of his feet, and not being able to walk, the gipsies had left him behind. Since then he had wandered about the country begging his bread, stealing it when not given to him ; and often on the point of dying of hunger, as he was on the day when he met Lucie.

" Papa," said she, one day, " Zach " (this was the name the little gipsy called himself)—" Zach actually does not know that there is a God."

" I do not wonder, my child : many children in the world know no more ; and many people live as if they neither knew it nor believed it."

" But how can we teach Zach ? We must not leave him in this heathenish state."

" Assuredly not. Try to read to him some verses out of the New Testament, about our Lord's life and miracles, and see if he can understand it at all. Do not read straight on : it will be above his comprehension ; all he needs to understand is that God loves us ; and sent His Son upon earth to save sinners."

The result of this conversation was, that Lucie undertook to instruct Zach,—a difficult task. She could not fix his attention. He wished to obey Lucie and listen to her ; but it was almost impossible for him to remain five minutes in the same place, or give his mind consecutively to the same thing. When he was read to, he fell asleep: he could not comprehend half the words in the book ; and at last Lucie, in despair, said to her mother—

“ I must give up reading the Bible to Zach, it only wearies him ; and does him no good whatever.”

“ Have patience, my child : it is a pity to give up so soon. What do you think interests him most ?”

“ I don't know—perhaps the stories.”

“ Well, if God has given him sense enough to take in the stories, it seems to me that a little girl might take the trouble to read and explain them to him. What do you say, my daughter ?”

Lucie did not reply : conscience-stricken, she determined to try hard to be useful to poor Zach.

So the readings continued ; and when Lucie

found them beyond her pupil's comprehension, she re-translated them into the simplest words possible. Zach learnt by degrees to sit still : he even ceased to dart off and climb up into the almond-tree for a flower that struck his fancy. According as the story advanced, his attention became riveted more and more : when Lucie came to the chapter which told of our Lord's Passion, he never took his eyes from her face, and seemed to devour every word. At the story of the Crucifixion, he burst into sobs and cries.

“ They have killed Him ! they have killed Him ! I thought to the last that He would have spoken a word and destroyed them all. Ah, if I had been there I would have died with Him. I know He would have been good to poor Zach.”

Touched and troubled by an emotion which to her was wholly unexpected, Lucie tried to make the boy understand how Jesus Christ rose again ; how He ascended into Heaven, where He was always ready to help those who prayed to Him, and would be ready to help poor Zach. Zach listened, but he always went back upon the same

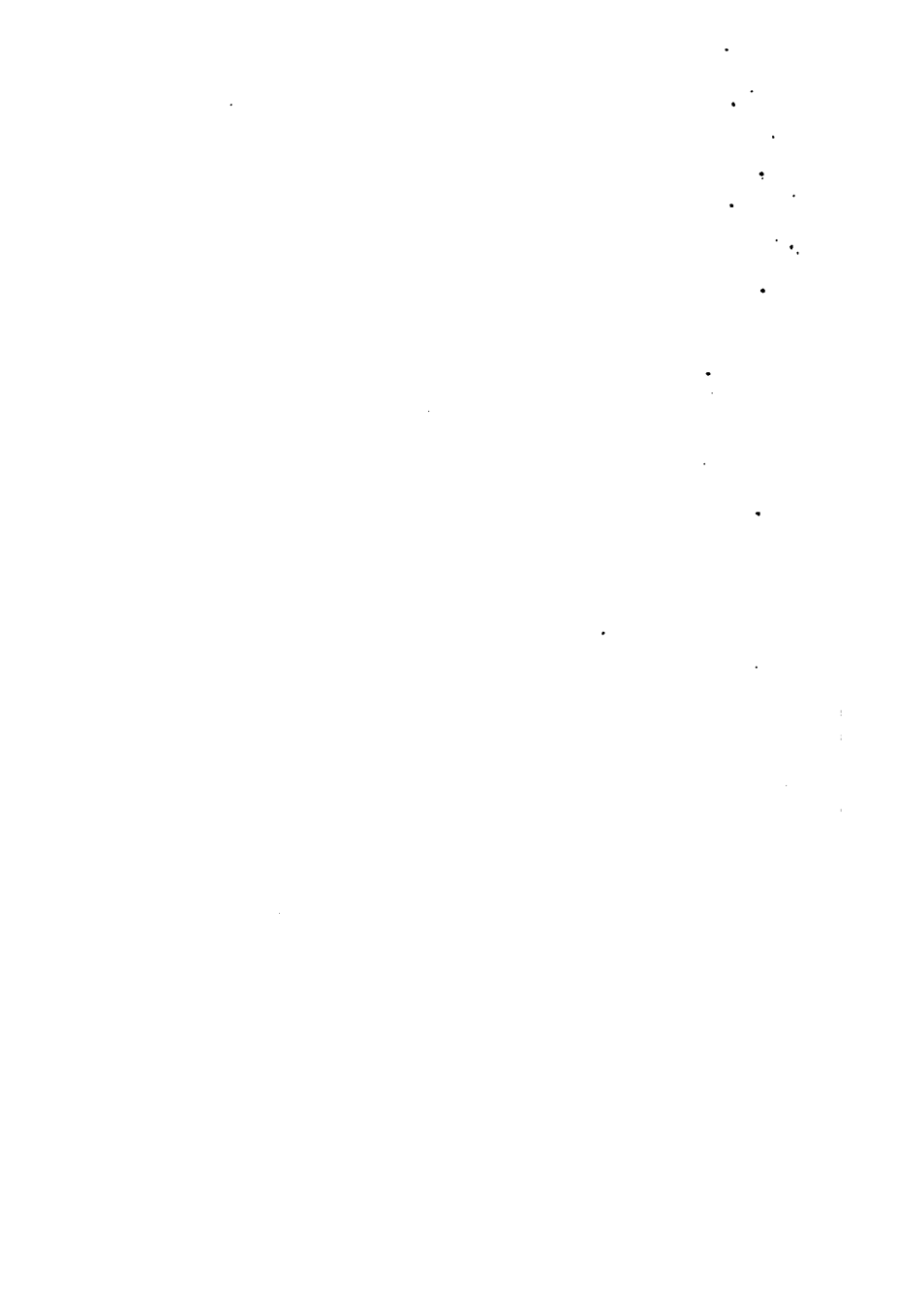
words, "They killed Him ; and He let them do it." And he went away repeating this over and over again.

But henceforward Lucie had no more reason to complain of Zach's inattention. Seated on the ground, his hands folded round his knees, and his great black eyes fixed on his young teacher, he listened greedily, and never forgot a single word. Love of the Lord Christ had taken full possession of the poor little ignorant soul ; and Lucie never ceased to be thankful that she had gone patiently on. Likewise in her inmost heart she was not sorry for his devoted and exclusive affection for herself.

For two days Zach had disappeared from his duties. Annette, who had a kindness for him, though she abused him pretty well sometimes, committed to Gothon the feeding of the ass, and declared that Zach had gone to regain his friends the gipsies. Nevertheless she listened for every step about the house, hoping it was the light, leaping footstep of the young vagabond.



LUCIE AND JACK.



"Here he is at last!" cried she, one Friday morning.

It was in truth Zach, carrying in his arms an enormous nosegay of white heath.

"Is Mademoiselle Lucie at home?" asked he of Annette.

"Yes, surely ; where else should she be? She wasn't likely to run after you, that I know of. A pretty business you have made of it, absenting yourself for two days, and leaving your work upon our hands!"

Zach was accustomed to hard words, even to blows, which latter he never got from Annette, so he contented himself with creeping out of her way to the drawing-room door, and there knocking timidly.

"Mama," cried Lucie, springing from her seat, "here is Zach! Oh, Zach, where did you get these beautiful flowers?"

Zach explained that he had brought them from the peninsula of Gien ; he heard they were in flower there, and he thought he would fetch Mademoiselle a nosegay.

"And what a nosegay! And such a distance you must have gone for it! It has taken you two whole days."

"Yes, mademoiselle."

And the little gipsy, approaching the sofa, knelt down before Madame Bessard, and kissed her hand, a habit he had, which it was in vain to try to break him of: he looked so unhappy whenever he was prevented from testifying his respect in his own peculiar way.

In the evening Lucie again called her mother's attention to the beautiful white heath.

"Zach says, mama, that the plants grow as tall as trees. I wish papa would take us to the peninsula of Gien. You might come, too, perhaps; you are strong enough, now?"

"No, my darling: I wish to economise all my strength for my journey home, and my duties there, since God in his mercy allows me to return."

"Mama, were you afraid of never returning?"

"Afraid? no; for I left all in God's good hands; but I felt very ill when I first came here, my child."

Lucie could not answer. She clasped her mother in her arms, and kissed her passionately.

"Mama, my own mama, how good God is to have made you well again!" said she, in a low voice.

"Since He has left us together still, my daughter, let us serve Him all the more."

Lucie never forgot these words of her mother.

"Who'll come with me to the peninsula of Gien?" said M. Bessard, one day. "I mean to be off thither the first thing to-morrow morning."

Lucie and Gustave were eager to go: Pauline proposed staying at home with her aunt, as it was such a long distance.

"No, no," cried Lucie. "I'll stay at home. I'll not give up my place beside mama to anybody."

Madame Bessard said that Annette would take care of her, and that she would be glad of the opportunity to do many things which she had too long neglected.

"I assure you, mama," answered Lucy, blushing, "you will find nothing in disorder."

"You mean," said M. Bessard, "that this will be a good opportunity for fatiguing yourself quite at your ease. I forbid it absolutely. Take your book—or write to your sons—you shall do nothing else."

"Nothing over much, I promise: so be content. Have you got a donkey?"

"Yes; and the lazy ones may ride him, turn and turn about."

So, before six o'clock next morning, they were all on the march—this merry troop, who had so much cause for content and thankfulness. The road was charming, though very long; but once arrived at the forest of heath, the joy of the children knew no bounds. Even their tall papa was hidden by the height of the plants—every minute some one was lost sight of, and found again. They made huge nosebags, with which they stuffed the ass's paniers, now emptied of provisions. Lucie particularly devoted herself to the gathering of anemones, blue, red, and lilac, which made a perfect carpet underneath the stems of heather. Then the sky was so blue, the air so

pure. She left her flowers a moment, and came to lean upon her father's arm.

"How beautiful everything is!" said she, softly.

"What a pity mama is not here!"

"Yes; she loves a fine view. But for me, the finest view in the world is to see your mother with her rosy cheeks and her healthy, vigorous air."

"How good God is to us, papa."

"Yes, my child, infinitely good."

And the father and daughter stood with their eyes fixed on the sea, which neither of them saw, for tears.

The return was less lively than the departure. Pauline was tired and a little dolorous; Gustave wished to lead the ass upon which she rode; but as he always led it into the ruts, his father took the bridle out of his hand, which extremely annoyed the susceptible and easily offended Gustave. For Lucie, she marched on, courageously and uncomplainingly, by her father's side.

On approaching Hyères, everybody revived. Madame Bessard was quite surprised to see her

wanderers return so soon ; but dinner was nearly ready, to the great satisfaction of the children. Lucie had just time to arrange her flowers in the vases, then, at half-past eight, everybody went thankfully to bed, Gustave having been already asleep for half an hour on his chair.

CHAPTER XIX.

ZACH.

THE news from La Vacherie was excellent.

M. Paul Sambois had sold the oxen, bought sheep, got through all the spring sowing under most favourable conditions ; and the account which he rendered weekly of his proceedings was most satisfactory. M. Bessard did not speak of leaving Hyères ; but the month of May arrived, and his wife could see that, without owning it, he was very anxious to be back again to his farm.

"When shall we go home?" said she to him one evening.

"I don't know ; I have never thought about it."

"But I have ; and I believe in a fortnight's time we may start for La Vacherie."

"Will not that be too soon for you?"

"For me? I am stronger than I was at twenty. I have laid in a store of health which will long resist what you call my fatigues. I am afraid of but one thing, which is, to find myself rather lonely, if you agree to something which I have to propose."

"What is that?"

"Your brother, as you know, wrote to me the other day, asking us to stay with him as we passed through Paris; and his wife added a postscript, inviting Lucie to remain with her afterwards, for a month or six weeks. Now, Lucie, who has nursed me so capitally, and has done better than I ever expected all the duties which have fallen upon her, poor child! has for the time being almost forgotten that she is a child, scarcely twelve years old; and fitted to obey, not to command."

"That is true; but what remedy have you for this almost inevitable evil?"

"I would like to accept her aunt's invitation, and leave her for some time in Paris among her three cousins. Céline and Marguérite are much older

than she ; they will not allow her to domineer over them. When she returns home, I shall have got into all my old ways, and she will not suffer from the change in hers. She will be content to learn lessons instead of ordering dinner."

"I think you are right, as regards Lucie. But you—shall you not miss her? Will you not get over-tired for want of your little lieutenant?"

"I will substitute Pauline : she is attentive, and as intelligent as Lucie ; but not having such a strong taste for governing, she is in less danger."

"As you will! My poor little Lucie ; such a capital housekeeper as she was to papa."

"That is precisely why I do not wish her all at once to become only a child again ; she would feel the difference too cruelly. So, if your sister-in-law renews her invitation, the matter is settled."

A few days after, M. Bessard had given notice to quit the house at Hyères, and had written to La Vacherie announcing his return. Madame Bessard had addressed to Marie six pages of domestic instructions : very much to Lucie's indignation, as

she wished to undertake the whole correspondence herself.

One morning, Madame Bessard received a letter in an unknown handwriting: she opened it with some curiosity, then calling her husband, gave it to him, smiling.

"You may buy back the Larières," said she.

"The Larières!"

"Yes: read."

The letter was from a lawyer, who announced to Madame Bessard the death of a cousin-german of her father's, leaving her a sum of twenty thousand francs.

"Well," said M. Bessard, "I should never have regretted the Larières, since the sale of those fields brought us hither; but I am glad I reserved the right to buy them back again."

"Do so, without loss of time; we must make hay there this year."

"And while I have been trying all means to scrape money together, she has been taking thought for me, this good old lady whom I never saw," said M. Bessard, meditatively.

"I saw her once, before my marriage. She was then quite an elderly lady, and never quitted her room ; and where, I remember, she lived in company with a monkey, a cat, and three parrots, which menagerie made upon me the liveliest impression. I hope she has provided for the future of all these animals, or their successors. But I am so glad, Henri, that my illness has not crippled the fortunes of our poor children, who will have little enough as it is."

"Let us not disquiet ourselves : not now at least ; when God has just shown us how well He takes care of us. Let us trust Him with our children's future as with our own. I must go and announce to our daughters that the Larières is not lost for evermore."

Great was the joy among the children, who were accustomed every year at hay-making season to breakfast in this favourite meadow, which was far enough from La Vacherie to make the feast a grand expedition and a keen enjoyment. Lucie ran to her mother.

"You are so pleased, mama, are you not ? Papa sacrificed the Larières to you ; now you can give it him back again. What happiness !"

"Your father and I do not often think of 'thine' and 'mine,' my dear child. However, if I could have bought back this meadow without his knowing, I believe I should have done it. His surprise would have been so amusing."

"O, what a pity that cannot be! But why not, since the money is yours?"

"Because wives can dispose of nothing without their husbands' permission."

"What, nothing at all! Why, that is like children, who may not give away their dolls without their mama's leave! A little provoking, if that sort of thing is to last all one's life."

Madame Bessard laughed. "My little girl, you had better renounce your independence. Women do not have it, I assure you; but it is a very trifling loss. Now, tell me, Lucie, have you informed Zach of our departure?"

"No, mama; and I hardly know how to do it, he will be so grieved."

She was still speaking, when there was a gentle knock at the door.

"Come in," said Madame Bessard; and Zach

came in, in a state of great agitation, and darted towards them.

"Madame and mademoiselle, is it true you are going away? Will you forsake poor Zach? Oh! take me with you; don't leave me here, the gipsies will have me again. Nobody will give me work in this part of the country: the first band of gipsies that passes will re-claim me, and how can I be good among them? You don't know, madame," cried poor Zach, throwing himself at Madame Bessard's feet, and kissing the hem of her dress, "You don't know what a life we lead under those tents. They will send me to steal hens, or vegetables, or fruit; and if I refuse they will beat me, or let me die of hunger, or kill me outright. But I would rather die," added he, rising up with a determined air, "I would rather die than be a bad boy again."

Madame Bessard and Lucie had listened, without interrupting him, to the poor little gipsy; when he stopped, quite exhausted, they regarded one another with some perplexity. What could be done with Zach at La Vacherie; and what would papa say on the subject?

Zach read their trouble in their eyes, and answered, "You may give me to eat anything you like, anything that nobody else would touch. And I can sleep in the stable, beside the ass ; Mademoiselle Lucie has told me there is an ass at your home. I will do anything anybody bids me. I am strong : you know, madame, every morning I carry a great bucket of water from the fountain, which is very distant, too. I will ask no wages, if only I may stay with you, because I love you."

Madame Bessard promised to speak to her husband, though she could promise nothing more. She reminded Zach that God would always take care of him, if he asked Him.

"Yes : Mademoiselle Lucie taught me to say, 'Our Father.' "

"Well, then, my dear Zach, He will be sure to hear you ; and perhaps if M. Bessard agrees to it, you and we may not be parted after all."

Zach, a little comforted by this hope, went away, begging Lucie to intercede for him.

"Monsieur almost always does what Mademoiselle Lucie asks him," said he, as he went back to

the kitchen. "So, perhaps, he will not send me away."

Annette shrugged her shoulders at the idea of the little gipsy being installed at La Vacherie ; but she had too good a heart not to be touched by the poor child's devotedness, and could not help saying to her mistress that it would be a charity to take him with them, since he had such a desire to be good, and if he were left forlorn most likely he would turn bad again.

Lucie waited impatiently for her father, who was gone to Toulon to pay some farewell visits. It was six o'clock before she saw him descending the steep slope that led to the house.

"Papa," she cried at once, "will you take Zach with us to La Vacherie?"

"Zach! What in the world am I to do with him? I have no claim on him whatever, nor he on me."

"Oh, but he wishes so to come. He says he cannot be a good boy if he remains here ; the gipsies will get him again, will force him to steal, or else kill him."

"Please be a little more intelligible, my dear. I can make out nothing, except that Zach wishes to accompany us home. Very natural, but slightly impracticable."

Lucie repeated to her father the conversation she and her mother had had with Zach ; giving all the boy's arguments with so much ardour and energy, that one would have thought she herself was in danger of being stolen by gipsies, and compelled to steal chickens ever afterwards. M. Bes-sard listened in silence ; but the expression of his face was not altogether discouraging to Lucie. She dragged him into the sitting-room.

"Mama, here is papa. If you will say a word for poor Zach, perhaps he may take him after all."

"Ah, Lucie has already told you the boy's odd request?"

"Yes. I certainly had no intention of giving you a page, H  l  ne, and if you want one, we had better hire him at home, which will save us Zach's travelling expenses."

Lucie watched anxiously her father and mother. They seemed both about to refuse poor Zach ; and

yet the boy's whole future welfare depended in their letting him come with them.

Her father saw her distress, and taking her on his knee, said : " Lucie, you can tell Zach that he shall go with us. His reasons have as much weight in my eyes as in your own ; and I don't mind giving myself a little trouble in order to keep the lad safe, and in the right way."

Lucie, triumphant, only took time enough to give her father one kiss in token of gratitude, and darted off to the kitchen, calling for Zach.

" He is gone to get hay for the ass," said Annette, " but he is sure to be back soon ; he will not go far away till he has got your papa's answer. If it is against him, I think he will almost lose his head."

Lucie ran into the garden. " Zach ! Zach ! papa will take you. I am so glad."

Zach stood dumb. His joy was less loquacious than his distress : not a word could he find ; but his big black eyes ran over with tears. At last he repeated softly to himself some words which Lucie had taught him, and tried to make him understand,

“ ‘I was hungry, and ye gave me to eat ; thirsty, and ye gave me drink ; naked, and ye clothed me.’ You taught me this, Mademoiselle Lucie. May God reward you !”

He threw himself on the ground at her feet, and bathed them with his tears.

Lucie, much moved by these solemn thanks, returned to the house ; and once more taking her place on her father’s knees, told him what Zach had said.

“ You are right, my child,” said M. Bessard, putting his arm round her : “ it would have been a great pity to leave this poor little soul among the gipsies. Now, young ladies both, here is a page at your service. What do you mean to do with him ?”

Pauline proposed that he should be employed in the garden, Denis had so much to do. Lucie thought he might serve as carter’s boy to the farm.

“ I don’t know to what extent your little gipsy could converse with a Norman labourer ; but I see that you don’t know what to do with him, so

I must find out something. In a week we start for Paris."

"For La Vacherie, papa," cried Lucie; and Pauline added,

"Oh, how pretty La Vacherie will be now."

"You must not forget the difference of climate. In Normandy, spring is only just beginning—here, it is in full glow."

"Yes, papa, it is already too hot to walk on the roads."

"And we came back all covered with dust, uncle."

"Then I suppose there is never any dust at La Vacherie?"

"Not much, anyhow," said Madame Bessard, smiling. "Papa, don't quarrel with them for their attachment to Normandy, which is their country, and ours too."

"Well, I'm not saying but that the idea of seeing again my meadows and my cornfields is rather pleasant. Provided, Hélène, that you will promise me not to catch cold. No more sitting in the open air for two and three hours, and then weeks of muffling in thick shawls."

Madame Bessard laughed heartily. "One would think I had lived all my life at Hyères, and quite forgotten the climate in which I have spent the last eleven years. No, no ; be assured I will take any precautions you choose."

"And I'll see that they are carried out, papa," said Lucie, with determination.

But poor little Lucie did not notice the sad look which her mother exchanged with her father.

Pauline did, however, and it made her thoughtful for the remainder of the day. What possible reason could there be for her aunt's looking mournful when Lucie spoke of going back to La Vacherie? Pauline could not make it out at all.

CHAPTER XX.

RETURNING HOME.

AS the day of departure approached, the children never wearied of their long walks up the mountains, to bid adieu to all their favourite nooks. Lucie would have liked to carry away all sorts of roots ; but it was too late to transplant them ; and, besides, flowers which flourished at Hyères would have been frozen to death in Normandy. Madame Bessard announced that she meant to do all the packing herself, and in spite of Lucie's resistance, the little girl had to take the mountain-walk with her father.

" I do it because mama seems to have no more need of me," said she, with some indignation.

Often, at the day's end, Madame Bessard was

very tired ; but she said nothing about it, and nobody perceived it. Her husband and daughters remembered painfully how thin and pale she was when she came to Hyères, and they were too happy to see her so fat and rosy now, to complain if she appeared a little weary sometimes.

It was the last evening ; and everybody was assembled in the garden in front of the house. Zach, decently dressed in a jacket and trowsers of coarse brown cloth, of which he was extremely conceited, had gone to take the ass back to its owner. Gustave, standing on a big stone, imitated a *pose plastique* representing a statue of Despair. Lucie, quizzing him, declared she was not in despair at all, but only too happy to leave this burning sun, and these dusty roads. Pauline thought Hyères very pretty, but preferred La Vacherie, and wished never to quit it as long as she lived.

“ When shall we arrive there, aunt ? ” she asked.

“ On Monday or Tuesday, my dear child.”

“ Oh ! ” cried Lucie, “ how I wish I had wings ! I would fly thither and arrive before mama, and put everything in order, far better than Marie can ;

and then I would make triumphal arches like those we used to erect when we were children—don't you remember, Gustave ?”

“ Yes ; we used to fasten together two stems of golden-rod, and though we could scarcely reach the top of the arch even by mounting our little benches, we hoped always papa would be able to pass underneath.”

“ And after all, the triumphal arch generally touched the last button of his waistcoat,” said Lucie.

“ I am afraid, my dear child,” said the mother, gravely, “ that I must content myself with Marie's arrangements for our coming home ; since, instead of sending you on in advance to La Vacherie, most probably we shall leave you behind at Paris.”

“ At Paris ! Without you, mama ?”

“ Yes ; your aunt wishes you to remain with her a month or six weeks, to make better acquaintance with Céline, Marguérite, and Suzanne ; and your papa and I think of accepting her invitation for you.”

Lucie's eyes filled with tears. “ Oh, what will become of me without you, mama ! I don't know

my aunt at all — at least, very little. And you will tire yourself so! Let me at least return with you to put the house in order, and then I'll go back to Paris, if you like."

"You forget I shall have Pauline with me. There would be no means of sending you back to Paris, and besides, when once you were at La Vacherie it would be much harder to leave it again."

"But, mama, you can't do without me!"

"Listen, Lucie," said the mother, tenderly. "You have nursed me with the utmost care, you have been most useful to everybody, and we are very well content with you; but for a little girl to say or to think 'you can't do without me,' is rather a mistake."

Lucie had tact and good sense. In spite of her extreme self-dependence and love of power, she was all the time conscious of these faults and of the necessity of fighting against them. Pauline's modesty was a constant lesson to her, when she was able to appreciate it. So, without another word, she rose, and passing behind her mother's chair,

kissed her ; then went and hid herself, all alone, in a dark alley, bordered by two hedges of pomegranate-trees.

Pauline and Gustave sat in a corner, talking together. The returning to La Vacherie had suddenly lost all its charms for them.

"Poor Lucie !" said Madame Bessard, to her husband ; "I thought it better to tell her the ill news here ; for I was afraid that at Paris, so near home, the blow would have fallen too hard."

"She quite understands the reason why we leave her behind ; and I doubt not, when she has got over her first vexation, she will try to correct this fault of hers. Thank God, her energetic disposition does not prevent her having a most tender conscience. Look ! there is Pauline going to meet her. Poor child ! the sacrifice will be as great for Pauline as for Lucie. In spite of the great difference in their natures, they are very fond of one another."

"Lucie promised me, five years ago, that she would love Pauline as I loved her Aunt Marie. She has well kept her word. If they were sisters, they could not be more tenderly united."

"Yes," said M. Bessard, "God gave us a treasure in giving us Pauline. If Lucie had grown up alone, her faults of character would have developed themselves much more."

"He doeth all things well!" answered Madame Bessard, in a low voice, as folding her hands together, she thought of the sister who had gone before her into eternal rest.

M. Bessard called his children back into the sitting-room. Lucie had very red eyes, but she had recovered her usual calmness. Pauline clung to her a little more closely than ordinary, as if she wished to hold her fast; but nobody said a single word, and they all quietly assembled for prayers. It was their last evening prayer before leaving Hyères, and all their hearts were full. Lucie and Pauline wept; and even Madame Bessard had tears in her eyes.

"Come, my children," said the father, as he rose, "think of what we feared when we came here six months ago; and why should we grieve over a separation of a few weeks?"

"I know that, papa; and I'll try—I'll try—"

But tears stopped Lucie's voice, and she ran away as fast as she could, Pauline following her.

"Come away, Hélène," said M. Bessard; "let us leave the two girls to comfort one another."

"Only let me go and kiss Lucie, lest she should think that we do this as a punishment."

"No, no, not a punishment—only for love," said M. Bessard, smiling, "and you may give her another kiss for me."

Madame Bessard entered her daughter's room, and without speaking, took Lucie in her arms and embraced her tenderly. Her child hung round her neck; then with a violent effort to command herself, she said—

"Mama, go to bed, please. You are tired already, and you have a journey to-morrow. Pray God for me!" she added, very low.

Madame Bessard kissed her daughter once more—then Pauline; and left them.

Lucie looked after her mother as she went away. "At least, you will take good care of her, Pauline." Then undressing in silence, she slipped to her knees at the foot of the bed. Her cousin was

already half asleep before Lucie put out the light and went to bed in her turn.

On the morrow, the 22nd of May, the sun was radiant and the weather charming. At six in the morning the carriage which was to take Madame Bessard and her daughters to Toulon stopped before the door. M. Bessard, Gustave, Annette, Zach, and the luggage, were to go by the diligence. This time, Madame Bessard required no invalid-carriage; and her daughters, who seemed to have quite forgotten their last night's trouble, could not help noticing the air of health and energy with which she was returning home to Normandy.

"What will Mother Bénard say? She thought we should never bring mama back again."

"She will be delighted and full of thankfulness. I think she would spend half the day in praying for us—this good old blind woman."

"Pauline," answered Lucie, after a pause. "You will distribute all our presents when you get home. And do not wait to sow the seeds in our gardens, or they will be too late; I shall see them springing up when I come back."

After overhearing this little conversation, Madame Bessard felt sure that Lucie had made up her mind, and most thankful was the mother for the same.

The train left at two in the afternoon, and the journey was got through without much fatigue as far as Marseilles, where they only stayed for half an hour, and then went on to Paris. At eight in the evening Pauline declared it was bed-time, and the two girls arranged shawls and rugs so cleverly that Madame Bessard said she was as comfortable as if she had been in an invalid-carriage. Everybody went to sleep, or pretended to do so; when, all of a sudden, in the middle of a tunnel, the noise of the carriage changed into a different sort of sound—the motion grew slower—then they felt a violent shock—the lamp was put out—and they remained stationary.

“Hélène! children! is anybody hurt?” cried M. Bessard; and immediately the screams, moans, and angry words of their fellow-travellers deafened them ail.

M. Bessard always carried lucifer-matches about

with him : in a minute the carriage was lit up with one ; while Lucie, who did not even seem frightened, searched her bag for a bit of wax-candle which she had popped in there at the last moment.

“ Mama ! mama ! ” said she, “ you don’t feel as if you were hurt ? ”

“ No, my child ; thank God, we are all safe, I think. What has happened, Henri ? ”

M. Bessard put his head out of the window, and soon found out that ten carriages had gone off the line. “ We shall probably have to pass the night here,” said he.

“ And what of the other trains coming after us ? ” cried Pauline in alarm.

“ They will send and stop them. Don’t stir ; I will get out and see if anybody is hurt.”

Soon he returned, saying that all the passengers had escaped with slight injury, except one young girl, who had received a severe blow on the head.

“ What has been done with her ? ” cried Madame Bessard.

“ She has round her half-a-dozen women crying

and screaming and shaking her, and nobody seems in the least to understand what should be done."

"Bring her to us, Henri," said the mother, eagerly ; "or shall I go to her?"

"No, no, it is terribly cold in this tunnel ; stay here, and I will go and see if they will trust her to us."

Five minutes after, two men, preceded by M. Bessard, carried the poor girl, still insensible, to Madame Bessard and her daughters, where, thanks to their wise care of her, she soon opened her eyes.

"Where am I ? where is mama ?" said she.

Madame Bessard told her she had had an accident, but that she was with friends, and need not be alarmed—only she must not speak. "Smell at these salts ; and Lucie, give me a handkerchief to stop this bleeding. Your hurt is not much, my poor girl. Don't move ; my daughter will arrange your hair."

The poor young stranger was placed upon the bed which had been made up of cushions and rugs for Madame Bessard. Gradually recovering

strength, and feeling that she was in kindly hands, she told them that she was eighteen years old, and a governess at Nice. She had been going to see her mother, who was ill in Paris.

"And when I reach her I shall be laid up too," said she, sorrowfully.

"Not so serious as that, I hope," replied Madame Bessard. "But does your mother know you are coming? Will she be anxious about you? What is your name, my dear?"

"Sara Wattier, Madame. Mama is not expecting me, for I started as soon as I got the ill news. Mama gives music-lessons in Paris."

"I will take you home to her myself as soon as we reach there. Meantime, be quiet and try to sleep a little."

"Oh, madame, I cannot sleep! Thank God, I was not killed! It would have been the death of poor mama."

At this moment M. Bessard appeared at the carriage-door, and told them things had been got a little into order, that a train and engine which had been sent for from Lyons, would be here in an

hour, and then they would be able to proceed on their journey.

"A good thing too ; for down below there are a lot of people who have not received a single scratch, yet are making as much noise as if they had lost all their legs and arms. We do not make half such a racket on a battle-field. But how is this poor girl ?"

"Better ; and I shall keep her with us till we get to Paris, when either I or Annette will take her home to her mother. By the bye, there is nothing amiss with Annette or Zach ?"

"Not a bit of it. Only Annette is scolding fiercely all the grumblers."

The train arrived from Lyons. Lucie and Pauline gathered together all the shawls and all the baskets.

"Come with us, my dear," said Madame Bessard to Sara Wattier. "I mean to take charge of you to Paris."

Sara blushed, then said timidly, "But, madame, I have only a second-class ticket."

"Never mind. I don't know what sort of car-

riages we may have allotted to us, but I am sure your injury entitles you to the distinction of a first-class ticket."

In fact, the guard of the train came to inquire for the young girl who had been hurt and to place her in a comfortable carriage. Madame Bessard and her daughters followed. M. Bessard, who had spent his time in trying to maintain order—no easy matter in a railway accident—soon rejoined them, and they all reached Paris safely at ten o'clock at night, having been detained four hours.

M. and Madame Paul Bessard, half beside themselves with anxiety, were waiting at the station. Most thankful were they to receive their dear ones all unhurt, and could scarcely believe their eyes at seeing Madame Bessard so little affected by the fatigue and agitation which she had gone through. They insisted on taking home with them the poor little governess.

"Yes, that will be far the best plan," said Madame Bessard. "It would never do to disturb her sick mother at eleven o'clock at night."

Sara, quite bewildered by so much kindness,

timidly followed Lucie to her room, where a mattress was being hastily spread upon the floor.

"It is not necessary, Annette," said Lucie. "I will sleep with Pauline, and Mademoiselle Wattier can take my bed ; she is in too much pain to sleep on the floor."

So she compelled poor little Sara to go to bed, then bidding her good night, went to see if Madame Bessard was very tired, and if she wanted anything. Taking care of her mother was a privilege that Lucie could not yet renounce.

CHAPTER XXI.

SEPARATION.

MADAME BESSARD felt so well next morning that she said laughing to her daughters, she believed railway accidents were good for her health.

“ Nevertheless, mama, it is lucky you have not that excellent remedy every day. Pauline has been talking in her sleep all night. I do believe she fancied she was driving the engine, for she kept blaming herself in the most pathetic manner, as if she had been the cause of all the mischief.”

“ Which was perhaps the reason I could not wake this morning. Mademoiselle Wattier is much better, aunt.”

“ That is a good thing—I was just going to ask

after her. Does she want to leave? Has Annette dressed her?"

"Oh, mama, she rose at six, and dressed herself without making any noise. Ever since, she has been sitting at the window waiting. I am sorry for her; for Annette is in curl-papers—and very bad humour."

"Go and ask your father to come and speak to me."

M. Bessard was in his brother's study; and they were conversing as two brothers do who are much attached to one another and seldom meet. M. Paul Bessard was a great scholar, especially in Oriental languages—"those languages in which there are no books," as his daughters used to say: he was relating to his brother the discovery of certain very curious MSS., when Lucie knocked at the door.

"Mama wants you, papa."

M. Bessard rose, and his daughter was following him, when her uncle held her back.

"It was so very nice of you, my dear child, to agree to stay here with us. Your cousins are all delighted, I assure you."

Lucie blushed, "Uncle," she stammered, "indeed—I did not want to stay—I would not have quitted mama."

"I understand, my child ; but she is quite well now, and she wishes you to remain with us. I would never have urged it if I had found her looking as she looked on her way to Hyères."

Lucie brightened up. "And so, uncle, you find her looking really better?"

"More than better, perfectly well. And your father, what a happy look he has, too! But run away, child, you may be wanted."

Quite gaily, Lucie ran to her mother's room, whence her father had just departed to take home to the Rue du Regard, Mademoiselle Sara Wattier.

"I am not in curl-papers ; and, I hope, not in bad humour," he had said, when his wife told him of the melancholy condition of Annette this morning. "So I think I am the best person to see the poor girl safe home. And, besides, I shall then learn something about her mother. The name of Wattier reminds me of something or other ; but

my memory is in such a muddle that I cannot make out what."

Lucie regretted not having said good-bye to Mademoiselle Wattier.

"I could not keep her waiting while I called you," said Pauline. "She would not rest anywhere. I think she was standing at the door nearly a quarter of an hour. But aunt says, since you will remain in Paris, if uncle finds that the mother is really a nice person, you can go and see her sometimes. Ah, Lucie, how sad it will be for me to go and see our poor people at home without you!"

"You will tell them I am coming," said Lucie, courageously. "They might have been too conceited if we had gone to see them both at one time. But you will give me all the news of everybody. Now let us go and see if my cousins are ready. When I knocked at their door half an hour ago, Céline had not yet opened her eyes."

Céline was a great girl of sixteen—very pretty, intelligent and good; but so lazy that there was no fear of her domineering over her sisters on

account of her superiority in age. Besides, Marguérite would never have let her do it. Marguérite was just fourteen, had large black eyes, and features irregular but agreeable. She loved music, sang well, and drew tolerably enough. Céline never would learn anything that she was not obliged : Marguérite learnt everything. For Suzanne, the third sister, she was only ten years old, very merry, game-some, inquisitive, and a little given to tormenting.

Madame Paul Bessard had brought her husband a considerable fortune, so that he could enjoy at ease all his favourite studies ; and the whole house breathed an atmosphere of abundance and luxury. Lucie was astonished to see how little her aunt troubled herself about domestic matters ; and could hardly believe it possible that a house could be well managed when the mistress only rose at nine o'clock in the morning.

While she was helping her mother to dress, Annette, who was busy unpacking, having not yet recovered her temper, Lucie unburdened herself about her aunt.

“ My dear child, I have always been compelled

to manage otherwise, because your father was not rich ; and I was poorer still : so that I have brought you up in different habits. But when you are left here alone, do not be always boasting of our ways ; it will only vex other people, and we shall end by believing ourselves infallible."

" But, mama, you are infallible. That is, you do everything better than anybody else."

" For example, I sing better than Marguérite, and I know Arabic more perfectly than your uncle ?"

Lucie laughed. " No, mama ; but it is only because you have no voice to sing with ; and have never had either time or opportunity to learn Arabic."

" Nor capacity neither. I have heard that it takes a man twenty years of hard study to understand even a little of Arabic."

" Then I'm sure it is not worth the trouble. But I see what you mean, mama. You do not wish me to boast of those I love."

" Precisely. You do not boast very often : you do things, and get others to do them, without

much talking ; but sometimes you forget that the perfections of those you care for may not be as clear to the rest of the world as to yourself."

Lucie thought she must be blind, indeed, not to see her mother's perfections ; but she answered nothing, and, as it was now ten o'clock, both mother and daughter entered the drawing-room together. They found there Madame Paul Bessard and Marguérite : Céline had not finished dressing, and Suzanne was taking a lesson on the pianoforte.

Five minutes afterwards there was a ring at the door-bell.

" That is Char—" cried Marguérite ; but at a sign from her mother she left the sentence unfinished.

The same moment Charles opened the door and sprang in. His mother was standing at the mantel-piece, warming her feet : she had her back to her son ; but she saw him in the mirror.

" Oh, my child !" cried she.

Charles took her in his arms, and would have carried her to a sofa, fearing lest her emotion might do her harm ; but she declared she was

quite strong now, and Charles believed it. He had never seen her looking so pretty, he thought.

"Ah, mama, papa did right in taking you to Hyères."

"Do I look so well? If you knew what care I have taken of myself, and what care has been taken of me!"

"Lucie would do that, I was quite sure. How she has grown! Lucie, you have become quite a young lady. And Pauline, how is she?"

"Pauline is taller than I am," said Lucie, "though she is a year younger. And she is still just as pretty as ever, and twice as good, if that be possible."

Madame Paul Bessard smiled. "The only thing which shows that Pauline and Lucie are not sisters is their mutual admiration of each other. As for my daughters, they pass their life in quarrelling."

"It is not easy to quarrel with Pauline, if I remember right," said Charles. "With Lucie it might be possible."

Madame Bessard here asked her son if he would not soon be commencing his examinations.

"Yes ; and I wish papa could say a good word for me to some of the examiners. He knows them all."

"But you are not uneasy about yourself?"

"Uneasy!" cried Madame Paul Bessard. "People say he will take first honours, undoubtedly."

"No," said Charles, "that is impossible: there are ten fellows older than I am who have worked very hard. But, mama, I hope to do pretty well, anyhow."

"Are we to get any breakfast, to-day?" said M. Paul Bessard, half opening the study-door. "Ho, Charles, how are you, my lad?"

Madame Paul Bessard explained that they were waiting for Charles's father, who had not yet returned from taking the poor young teacher home.

"Don't wait for him, Louise; Rue du Regard is quite the other end of the world; and if he gets interested in the sick mother he will forget breakfast and everything else."

Fortunately, they took Madame Bessard's advice; and had just finished breakfast when M. Bessard

appeared. After having welcomed his son he turned eagerly to his wife.

"Hélène, I have found out who M. Wattier was—the paymaster who was with us at Algiers in 1840. He died young, leaving his wife with a little daughter a year old, and no money at all. She managed to live by giving music-lessons, and when the girl was old enough, placed her as a teacher in a school. Now she has fallen ill; and I fear they will sink into poverty. Paul, could anything be done for her?"

"Make a note for me of the husband's services and the wife's present position, and I'll try to get her appointed to a *bureau de tabac*.* Where does she come from?"

"From Vire, which is another thing in her favour—at least as regards us. Wattier was a Swiss, but naturalised."

Madame Bessard asked her husband if he had recognised the poor widow.

"Perfectly; she has kept up her ladylike manners

* In every French town tobacco is sold under a special license from Government, often given to women.

through the hardest life." Then turning the conversation, he asked Charles about the other two boys.

"They will be here, presently. I know they have special permission to go out to-day. Edouard scarcely sleeps, and as to eating, he devours only his papers. You will find him very thin. He is quite absorbed in his examination."

"And yours, my boy?"

"Mine is not so difficult. But it is no joke to get into the Ecole Polytechnique. Paul is rubbing his hands all day long at the thought that there will be no examination needed in order to become a farmer at La Vacherie."

"Little lazybones! But he works well, nevertheless?"

"Yes; that he may have done with work the sooner. He likes history and natural science; and the professor of physics adores him; for Paul is the only boy in the class who pays the least attention to his lesson."

"That is because Paul thinks it will be useful in agriculture. Well, I'm afraid Gustave also will not kill himself with overwork at Brest, whither I

mean to take him in the autumn for his examinations."

"Oh," cried Madame Paul Bessard, "when I see this endless anxiety about studies and examinations, and the future career of sons, I console myself for having only daughters."

"Nevertheless, sons are not so bad," answered M. Bessard, glancing towards the antechamber, where he saw his two boys entering.

Edouard was much grown ; and Charles was right in calling him so thin ; but mathematics had not so absorbed his faculties as to make him insensible to the pleasure of seeing his parents, his sisters, and Gustave. As to Paul, La Vacherie was the summit of all his desires. He was happy enough with his playfellows, and had some friends, with whom he dilated on the felicities of a country life. But nothing pleased him like a walk with his father across the fields, or a morning spent in overlooking the farm-labourers.

The two boys were delighted to see their mother looking so well ; and asked how long she meant to stay in Paris ?

"Only two days. Your father is anxious to get home. So should I be, but for those I leave behind."

"Paul does not know that I am to be left with aunt for a month," said Lucie, sadly.

"Is she? Hurrah! Then I shall not lose you all, any how. But Lucie, without meaning any incivility to aunt, how could you be so stupid as to pay her your visit at this time—to remain shut up in bricks and mortar, when La Vacherie will be looking so beautiful?"

"It suited mama best," replied Lucie, in a very low voice.

"Now, cousin Paul," said Margu rite, "don't discourage Lucie. We are already anything but gratified by the miserable look she puts on whenever she speaks of her stay with us in Paris."

Here Lucie's uncle interfered, and told them not to tease her: it would have been a shame if the child were not sorry to part with her mother.

Madame Bessard made a sign to her brother-in-law to say no more. Poor Lucie turned away to the window, and stood looking into the court-yard below, her tears nearly choking her.

"Courage, my child," said her mother, and took her away to her own room, where the boys soon followed, to say good-bye to their parents.

"In two months and a half, please God, we shall all of us be together at La Vacherie," said M. Bessard, "and I hope to be very proud of both my under-lieutenant and my Polytechnician."

"Don't be too proud too soon, father," returned Edouard, laughing.

"No, no ; I'll not admit the possibility of failure. And I do hope the rank that you both will take in your examination will be high, and thoroughly satisfactory."

The three lads embraced their mother, and ran off, without reappearing in the drawing-room.

"At least," said Edouard, "their journey south has been satisfactory: mama looks ten years younger than she did."

"And since La Vacherie has not suffered from their absence—"

"Paul, it's lucky all the world does not believe in the charms of La Vacherie as you do, else

everybody would come and live there, and build round it, and we should be soon in the middle of a town. So, good-bye, both of you," added Charles, as he parted from his brothers. "Our grand performance will soon be done and over, now."

"It's your last exploit; but I have still two years of grinding before me," said Edouard, as he and Paul took the road to Sainte Barbe, while Charles went off to Saint Cyr.

M. Bessard was glad to get his wife away; for the idea of parting from Lucie became continually more painful. The poor child seemed to guess what was required of her, and tried hard to amend; but it was so difficult to break through the habits of six months. She submitted without either entreaties or complaints; but she looked so mournful that her father determined to shorten the time of suspense, convinced that as soon as it was over she would recover herself.

Next morning, at eight o'clock, Lucie accompanied to the railway her father and mother, Pauline, and Gustave. She said not a word, but seated next to her mother in the cab, she held

tight clasp of her hand. The tickets were taken. M. Paul Bessard was waiting to take Lucie back.

"Good-bye, mama," said she ; and casting one look upon her father, Pauline, and Gustave, she ran away, without daring to come back again.

"It is over, my dear," said M. Bessard, taking his wife's arm. "In a month we shall see our little Lucie once more."

"I'll take you back myself in a month from now," whispered kind uncle Paul, as he went home with his niece.

"Thank you. In a month ? You'll not keep me a day longer ?" answered she, and smiled in spite of her tears.

CHAPTER XXII.

LUCIE IN PARIS.

LUCIE was a determined little personage. She knew well that her mother had left her behind in order to break her of the habit of domineering over everybody, which would never do, now that she herself was able again to take in hand the reins of government. So Mademoiselle Lucie Bessard made up her mind to correct herself as speedily as possible.

Her aunt, who knew nothing of Madame Bessard's motives in making such a sacrifice, would have willingly allowed Lucie to take her place in the drawing-room with Céline, receive and pay visits like a grown-up young lady ; and Marguerite declared she would be delighted to show

Paris to her cousin. But Lucie had made her own resolutions differently.

"Aunt," said she, "do you think Miss Lamb" (their English governess) "would be good enough to allow me to take my lessons with Suzanne?"

"Certainly, my dear," said Madame Paul Besard, much surprised; "but you are not here to work."

"Still, if I may work a little, I shall enjoy myself much more. I am only twelve months older than Suzanne, and I have lost my time sadly this year."

Her aunt was still rather amazed, but being extremely kind, and accustomed to let her own children do very much as they chose, she made no further objection to her niece's wish. So Lucie soon found herself established in the school-room with Miss Lamb and Suzanne, which latter made great fun of her, and declared that she must certainly be ill, if she wanted to work when she might do nothing but amuse herself.

The fact was, Lucie did not care to amuse herself. Her one thought was, to do as her mama

desired, to turn into a little girl again, to be with her youngest cousin, and work as hard as she could, that she might the sooner be permitted to return home.

Her uncle, who had had some talk with his brother about Lucie, and who was not so much absorbed in Oriental languages but that he could find time to observe her energetic and rather imperious nature, understood what she wished and seconded her warmly ; only he declared she should not remain shut up in the school-room all day long, and he took care to get plenty of tickets for museums, picture-galleries, &c. So each day, Miss Lamb and her two pupils, and sometimes Marguérite also, went to these places, to the various churches, or to the Louvre. Lucie drew a little, but she had hardly ever seen a picture. The museums and picture-galleries were to her a new source of enjoyment. She could often have stayed an hour before a single picture if Suzanne had not been so impatient. As for Miss Lamb, she went about, catalogue in hand, satisfied herself with identifying the artist's name, the date, and the subject of the painting, and then passed

on to the next one. Margu rite, on the contrary, sympathised with Lucie up to a certain point.

“Oh, how I wish mama were here,” cried Lucie, one day, when she had spent half an hour before St. Michael and the Dragon, in the grand gallery of the Louvre.

“Ah!” said Margu rite, “your mother must know it well; she was brought up in Paris. Yes, she is the sort of person one would very well like to go with to a picture-gallery.”

“Is there any engraving or photograph of this picture?”

“I don’t know, but I will ask my father.* Why do you want to know?”

“I would like to take it to mama, if it is not too dear.”

“Photographs are never dear. I will ask my

* French children, while still children, call their parents “papa” and “mama;” but after twelve years old it is thought a lack of respect to say anything but “mon p re” or “ma m re.” But the “tutoyer”—thou and thee—which I have not attempted to translate, as in English it would convey a totally different impression from that it gives in French—is used throughout life by near relations in their intercourse with one another.

father to show you his collection. He has all the statues and pictures in the Vatican at Rome ; they are superb."

Here Miss Lamb, who had been walking up and down the gallery, called the two girls, and they all went home. Lucie felt no great desire for study, and was longing to write to Pauline. But she felt that, having asked permission to work with Suzanne, she had no right to lose her time ; so she put off her letter, and applied herself with all her might to the English translation which Miss Lamb had set them both.

"I shall be sorry when you leave, Lucie," said the governess, when she had corrected the translation. "Suzanne works infinitely better with you here. Would not your mother allow you to stay a little longer ?"

"Oh, no, no ; I would never ask her. I am only too anxious to get back to her, and Pauline is much more alone than Suzanne, who has Céline and Marguérite."

"That is true," said Miss Lamb, though she looked as if she doubted whether Céline and

Marguérite were much help to their younger sister.

Suzanne, however, took a violent affection for Lucie, who was a little older than she, and well able to understand her. She interested herself in all her cousin's reading, in her plays also, and even conceived a great respect for the strong religious feeling which Lucie evidently had, though she did not put it obnoxiously forward. When Suzanne saw Lucie always ready to help her, whatever she happened to be doing, and equally willing to take up Céline's neglected work, or to turn Marguérite's pages when she practised her music, the child often thought how very comfortable it must be to have a sister who was busy over other people and not over herself.

Lucie remembered her mother's warning and did not criticise either her aunt's or her cousins' arrangements, even when she could not approve of them ; and she said as little as possible of La Vacherie and its inhabitants. One morning, however, she came downstairs with such a radiant face, that her uncle asked if any one had left her a legacy ?

"No, no," laughed Lucie. "But I have got a letter from home!"

"Better than a legacy. What does it say?"

"It is from Pauline, and she tells me that our poor people were so happy to see mama back again quite well, that—that——"

"Don't cry, child, pray. May one read the letter?"

"Certainly, uncle, if you wish."

"And aloud?"

"Yes, yes," said Marguérite. "I should like to read Pauline's letters."

Lucie assenting, uncle Paul read:—

"MY DARLING LITTLE LUCIE,—

"First, aunt is wonderfully well, does not fatigue herself at all, and does me the honour to allow me to wait upon her in your stead, which is not at all the same thing to her, whatever she may say. La Vacherie is prettier than ever. M. Sambois has spoiled nothing; the garden is better than last year. Denis has grafted a quantity of new roses this winter. The two cherry-trees that

we planted in our garden are covered with little cherries, which are waiting for you before they ripen. Uncle runs about all day long ; I believe he has visited all his corn-fields, and looked separately at every stalk of wheat. The beasts are all quite well, but none of them recognised us, excepting Labrador. Zach's business is to see to the ass, to carry water to the kitchen, and lots of other things. Uncle is well content with him, and he comes in to prayers every day.

"I would have given anything to have had you here last Sunday. As we went out of church all our poor people, and many others from the neighbourhood, came to meet us ; everybody had a nosegay, and when Father Martin approached aunt and bade her welcome home, everybody shouted, 'Long life to Madame Bessard !' and laid their flowers down before her. Aunt was so touched that she began to cry. Then she thanked old Martin, saying how happy she was to be back at La Vacherie among them all. 'Thank God for bringing you back, madame,' said Mother Bénard ; 'we were all very dull without you.' And then they went

away, saying how well she looked, and how handsome she was still. And, Lucie, I was quite of their opinion, for she had on that blue bonnet which becomes her so well, you know. Gustave almost sprained his wrist with shaking hands with everybody. And what do you think uncle said when the people were gone—‘Oh, what a pity my little Lucie was not here!’ At which aunt sighed.

“But you will soon come back. I’ve tried, and I can’t do without you. Aunt does everything as usual, and is not tired. I, too, work a great deal, but nothing is amusing without you. I love you dearly.

“PAULINE.”

“Well,” said Margu rite, “I would quit my affectionate family to-morrow, if I might receive from them such letters as this. Lucie, your Pauline is charming ; couldn’t you lend her to us?”

“No, no. You have two sisters, I only one.”

“Ah,” said Suzanne, “but you have four brothers.”

"Lucie is beaten ; she can't answer that," said Madame Paul Bessard. "Not that her brothers are of much use to her, as we have three of them in Paris, and the fourth is going to Brest this autumn."

"My brothers of no use to me, when I love them so much !"

"Quite right, my child," said Uncle Paul. "Ah, I foresee that we shall not be able to keep you with us long, if you are so fond of home."

"Mama said you were to keep me for a month or six weeks, uncle. Now, if it were convenient to you and to her that I might go back in three weeks from this time, I shall have been here five weeks."

"That is splitting the difference, as the butchers say in our country. We shall see. If I am at liberty then, I would much like to take you home. Paris air seems to choke you."

"No, no, uncle. But mama and Pauline are away—and—it is so long since I saw La Vacherie."

"I understand it all, child. Now I must be off to the Institute. The day after to-morrow you shall see your brothers—those at Sainte Barbe

at least ; and one of these Fridays I will take you to Saint Cyr."

Lucie was very grateful to her uncle for his incessant kindness, and would have liked to show her gratitude, but did not know how. At last, one day she saw him enter his study with a large bundle of papers. An idea struck her.

"Have you nothing to be copied, uncle?"

"Nothing but what is too fatiguing for a child like you."

"But if my cousins copy for you, might not I? I should like to do something for you. You are so good to me."

"Your cousins never do my copying."

"Perhaps," said Lucie, timidly, "they get tired with writing ; but writing only amuses me. Please, uncle."

"Well, just to amuse you, I'll give you a MS. which you will not understand in the least, but which I should be glad to see written out legibly. There !"

Lucie, triumphant, carried the big packet to her room, and began to copy it in her very best hand-

writing. Marguérite, coming in search of her, found her deep in this occupation.

"What in the world are you doing, Lucie?"

Lucie blushed—"Only copying something for uncle. I met him with such a big packet of MSS."

"His daughters have never done anything for him," said Marguérite, in a low voice. "Give me half of your pages."

Lucie did so, and both the girls went on copying in silence. In about half-an-hour their task was done. Lucie put the pages in order, and gave them to Marguérite.

"No, no, take them yourself to my father, only tell him that, when you are gone, I will be his secretary, if he likes."

Lucie willingly delivered this message, at which her uncle, taking her in his arms, kissed her without making any reply.

CHAPTER XXIII.

REUNION.

“**S**EE, Lucie,” said Marguérite, one morning, as she entered her cousin’s room, “here is our present to you, and you may do what you like with it.”

“What can it be?—what have you got in your hand?”

“Look yourself.”

And Lucie, opening the little folio, found therein a collection of very pretty photographs, after the finest religious pictures from the museums of Rome, Paris, Dresden, and Madrid. She lifted up to her cousin such loving, grateful eyes that Marguérite could not help kissing her, saying—

“Why are you so nice and good? I meant to

hate you because you would not stay with us, and instead I love you with all my heart."

Lucie could not admire enough her pretty pictures.

"They are a present from Céline, Suzanne, and your humble servant ; and we all agreed that you might dispose of them just as you liked. Give them to your mother—to Zach, if you choose."

"Don't make fun of Zach. I believe he would admire them very much, but as he sleeps in the stable, his room would not well accommodate such ornaments. I had rather choose mama and Pauline to give my pictures to."

"And you are very glad you are leaving us to-morrow?"

"Not glad to leave you, but very glad to get home. And you will visit us there this summer? Aunt has promised you shall."

"Yes ; and if you come to her, she has something else to give you."

Madame Paul Bessard, who thought a good deal of dress for herself and her daughters, had also taken thought of her niece's summer toilette.

Lucie was quite confounded to find herself the possessor of a charming little travelling-trunk, which contained a dress of grey silk, another of pink muslin, a mantle of black taffetas, a straw hat trimmed with rose-coloured taffetas, without reckoning a considerable provision of ribbons and gloves.

"Why, mama never had so many pretty things since she was married," said Lucie to herself; and determined to share out of this wealth all that possibly could be shared, with Pauline. "But, aunt, you forget that we live in the country. I really dare not wear this beautiful hat at La Vacherie."

"I am sure the hats your mother plaits are quite as pretty as this one."

"The straw is as fine, but mama does not trim them with such grand ribbons. Suzanne, if you like, I'll make you a hat to take walks in when you come to La Vacherie."

"Suzanne had better take care, or I shall steal it," said Marguérite.

Edouard and Paul, who had dined every Sunday with their aunt since Lucie was here, came now to

bid their sister good-bye. The Friday before, she had been taken to Saint Cyr to see Charles ; but she was bewildered by the place—there were so many people about—and Lucie, rather frightened, went away saying to Charles that she should not think she had properly seen him till she saw him at La Vacherie with all his college-work done.

“ And I shall perhaps be obliged to join my regiment at once.”

“ I hope not. Surely you will get some leave of absence between times.” And comforting themselves thus, they parted.

On her return Lucie found Madame and Mademoiselle Wattier waiting for her. She had seen them both pretty often, thanks to the kindness of her aunt, who had sometimes sent Miss Lamb and Suzanne with her to the Rue du Regard, distant though it was. Lucie had taken a great liking for Sara Wattier, who had quite recovered from her railway accident. Her mother, too, was well again, and Madame Paul Bessard, after having invited her once or twice to dinner, found her so good and amiable, that she tried to stop her hus-

band from setting her up in the tobacco-bureau, saying that it was a thousand pities to bury so charming a person in a village.

"Still, this charming person must live without killing herself with music-lessons," said M. Paul Bessard, and went on with his scheme.

Paul and Edouard had arrived, and Lucie was somewhat impatient with the delay of her other two visitors, when her uncle, opening his study-door, called her, and told her to give the paper he held to Madame Wattier.

"By a lucky chance, Lucie, one of the tobacco-bureaux at Vire is just now vacant. Your father informed me of it, and I have got Madame Wattier appointed. She will be glad, and you too, I think."

"In her native place, too! Uncle, how good you are!"

"I did nothing but ask the appointment for her. Stop—there she is."

"Do tell her yourself, uncle."

"Not at all. That pleasure belongs to you. Mademoiselle Wattier is your friend. How pleased she will be to live within reach of La Vacherie."

Poor Madame Wattier, more accustomed to sorrow than joy, could hardly believe in the good news.

"At Vire?" cried she. "In my own country-town, and near you all! Our bread assured to us for life! Oh, how merciful God is!"

Lucie needed, neither for herself nor her kind uncle, any other thanks than these.

"I am glad to think I shall see Sara. We do not often go to Vire, but mama will be happy to see her at La Vacherie."

"Until I find a situation," said Sara—and explained that she was then in search of one, as the schoolmistress she lived with at Nice had not been able to wait for her return. "Oh, if I could find some teaching in the neighbourhood of Vire!"

"I will speak to mama. I shall see mama to-morrow. She will be so glad to hear that your mother is so happy." And Lucie was just bidding good-bye to Sara, and kissing her, when Paul and Edouard came into the room.

"Who are these two ladies whom you are treat-

ing with such uncommon affectionateness?" asked Paul.

Lucie explained, and also the good news just received.

"What lucky people! Now, if I could manage to break my head on a railway, and then find myself in the ten first of our school-list!" remarked Edouard.

"You are breaking your head all day long for that end," said Paul.

"But I would rather break it outside, in Sara's fashion, than inside, with lines of figures and problems in geometry!" cried Lucie.

"So would I. Yet Edouard never looks tired."

Edouard shrugged his shoulders, and asked what would be the good of getting tired, since he must work on for two years more.

"I wish I could take you both home with me to-morrow, and Charles too."

"Thank you, Lucie. Ever since you told me you were going home, I dream every night about La Vacherie—of my father, and Gustave, and the farm-people; and when I wake, there I am in one

of our dreadful dormitories, filled with beds. I should like to give my next neighbour a good blow with my fist, out of sheer vexation."

"He would soon give it you back, Paul," said Lucie, laughing. "And you will come home, remember; and when your schooldays are over, you will be at home for good."

"That's a consolation. But here is Edouard watching the clock. We must be off. Good-bye, little Lucie. Kiss mama for me, and Pauline too."

"I am sure I shall find them at Vire. If you knew what lovely presents I am taking home!"

"Come, come, we can't stop," cried Edouard. "Lucie, write us word soon if mama is well."

When the boys were gone, Suzanne called her cousin to see something that was lying on the table in Lucie's room. It was a charming travelling writing-case of green morocco, and beside it was a slip of paper with the inscription: "From M. Paul Bessard to his little secretary." Everything was complete in it—paper, pens, envelopes, and there were even different sorts of postage-stamps.

"Oh, how good my uncle is! I must run and thank him immediately."

"It is I who ought to thank you, my little girl," said Uncle Paul. "You have worked for me in all your leisure moments; and moreover you have left me an excellent secretary, who might not have thought of offering me her services if you had not given her the idea. I forewarn your mother, if ever you are missing, she may know that I have kidnapped you."

"No, no, I can't leave mama. You come to La Vacherie, uncle; that will be far better."

"I shall go there, to-morrow; and shall bring my whole family with me in September. Now run and pack your trunks."

Next morning, Lucie could hardly hide the delight which greatly surpassed her regrets at leaving Paris. Her intense satisfaction gleamed through all her farewells; and when she had parted from her aunt and cousins, she darted into the cab which took her to the railway with the lightness of a bird.

"At last!" cried she.

Her uncle could not help bursting out laughing.
“ At last ! So you’re off ! ”

“ Don’t be angry with me, please ! I am so glad to go back to them all.”

“ I was only laughing, child ; for I am almost as glad as you.”

The journey would have seemed very long to Lucie, if she had not taken the wise precaution of sleeping all the time she was in the diligence between Saint Lô and Vire. The ten leagues were soon traversed, and it was about eleven at night when she found herself in the streets of the great metropolis, as they called this, the nearest town to La Vacherie.

“ There’s papa ! ”

And the next moment she was in her father’s arms, and hanging round Pauline’s neck, without troubling herself about the passers-by, who are, in truth, not very numerous, at eleven at night, in the streets of Vire.

“ Mama is well ? And Gustave ? ”

Questions and answers succeeded so fast, and they were all so happy to meet again, that Lucie could

scarcely believe her eyes when she saw already the glimmer of the lights at La Vacherie.

“ Here we are, my child,” said M. Bessard, helping her out of the carriage.

“ Mama ! mama ! here I am !”

“ My darling child ! we will never be parted more.”

And clinging to her mother, Lucie went into the house—the happy, happy Home.

CHAPTER XXIV.

LA VACHERIE ONCE MORE.

LUCIE, once at home, returned to all her old home ways. She troubled herself no more about the house-keeping affairs : she helped her mother whenever she was needed ; but did not attempt to rule over anybody. She worked very hard ; and had all the while such a happy look in her face, that Madame Bessard often paused in the midst of other occupations to watch her little daughter.

“I don't know to what I should attribute Lucie's great improvement since her stay in Paris,” said the father ; “but undoubtedly she has lost her great propensity for governing everybody and everything, whether or no.”

"She has tried hard to fight with herself, by God's help; and her separation from us all has done this much good;—it has taught her that, at whatever sacrifice, we would have corrected her of this great defect. Still, I doubt if they have treated her very much as a little girl, at Paris."

"Except by her own desire," laughed M. Bessard. "I was excessively amused to hear my brother Paul tell of his wife's intense astonishment when Lucie told her she wished to take lessons with Suzanne! By the bye, I have an idea as to lessons. Suppose we were to take in Mademoiselle Wattier for a year or two? She would be able both to finish her own education and help you with the girls. I think her mother would be delighted with such an arrangement, as it would enable Sara to undertake much older pupils than she has now."

Madame Bessard greatly approved of this plan, so her husband lost no time in carrying it into execution. A month afterwards, Sara Wattier, having established her mother comfortably at Vire, came to reside at La Vacherie. She was so happy to find herself with Madame Bessard and Lucie,

that Pauline pretended to be quite jealous of their mutual regard.

It was near the end of August, and Monsieur and Madame Bessard were full of anxious thought. Nobody dared mention the word "examinations," although the critical moment was close at hand.

At length, one morning, M. Bertin's carriage was seen far off, driving along the road. The good old physician was waving a paper in the air. As soon as he caught sight of that paper, Gustave started off running, and arrived breathless at one side of the carriage at the same instant that M. Bessard, suddenly leaping out of a thicket of underwood, appeared at the other.

"First, Saint Cyr ; sixth, Polytechnique !" cried out M. Bertin.

"Is it possible ! Thank God !" answered the father. And he pressed his old friend's hand in hearty gratitude for the news.

Gustave lost not a second. He just heard the numbers "first" and "sixth," then set off running once more as hard as he could, and never stopped till he dropped, quite exhausted, at his mother's feet.

“Charles, first ; Edouard, sixth !” cried he, almost choking.

Madame Bessard put her hand over her eyes. Lucie, who had darted forward to throw herself into her arms, paused. She saw that her mother was silently thanking God.

THE END.

